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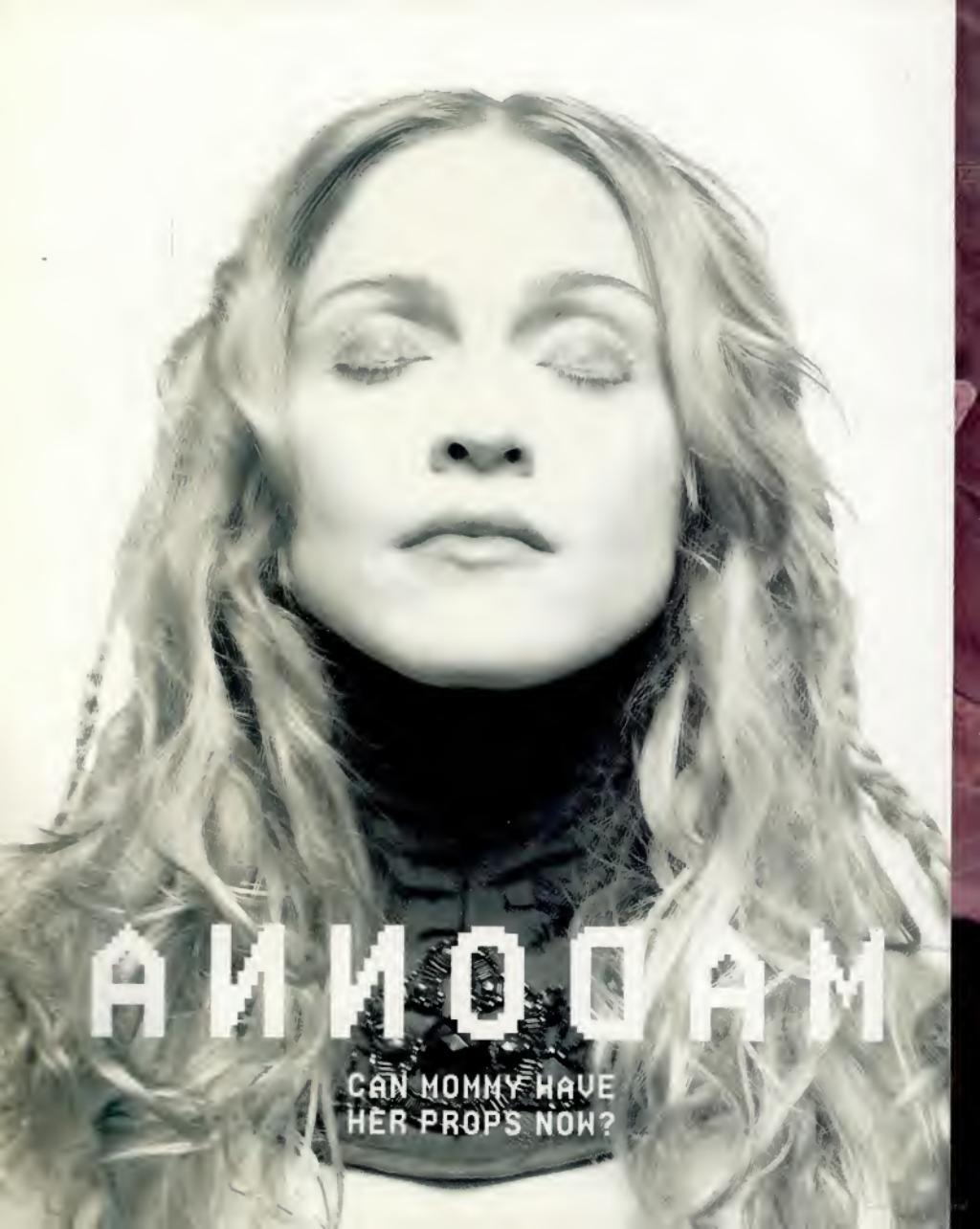
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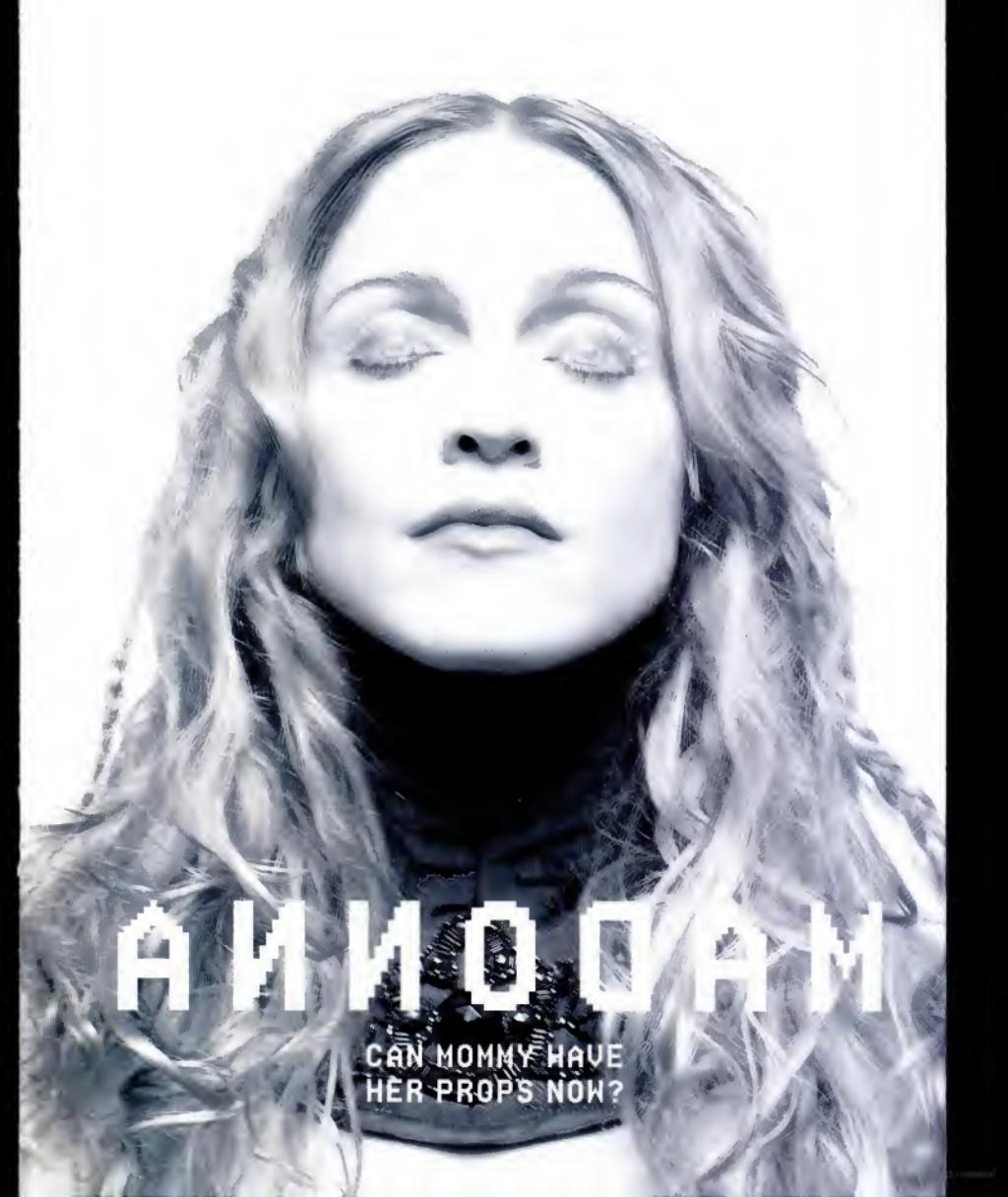




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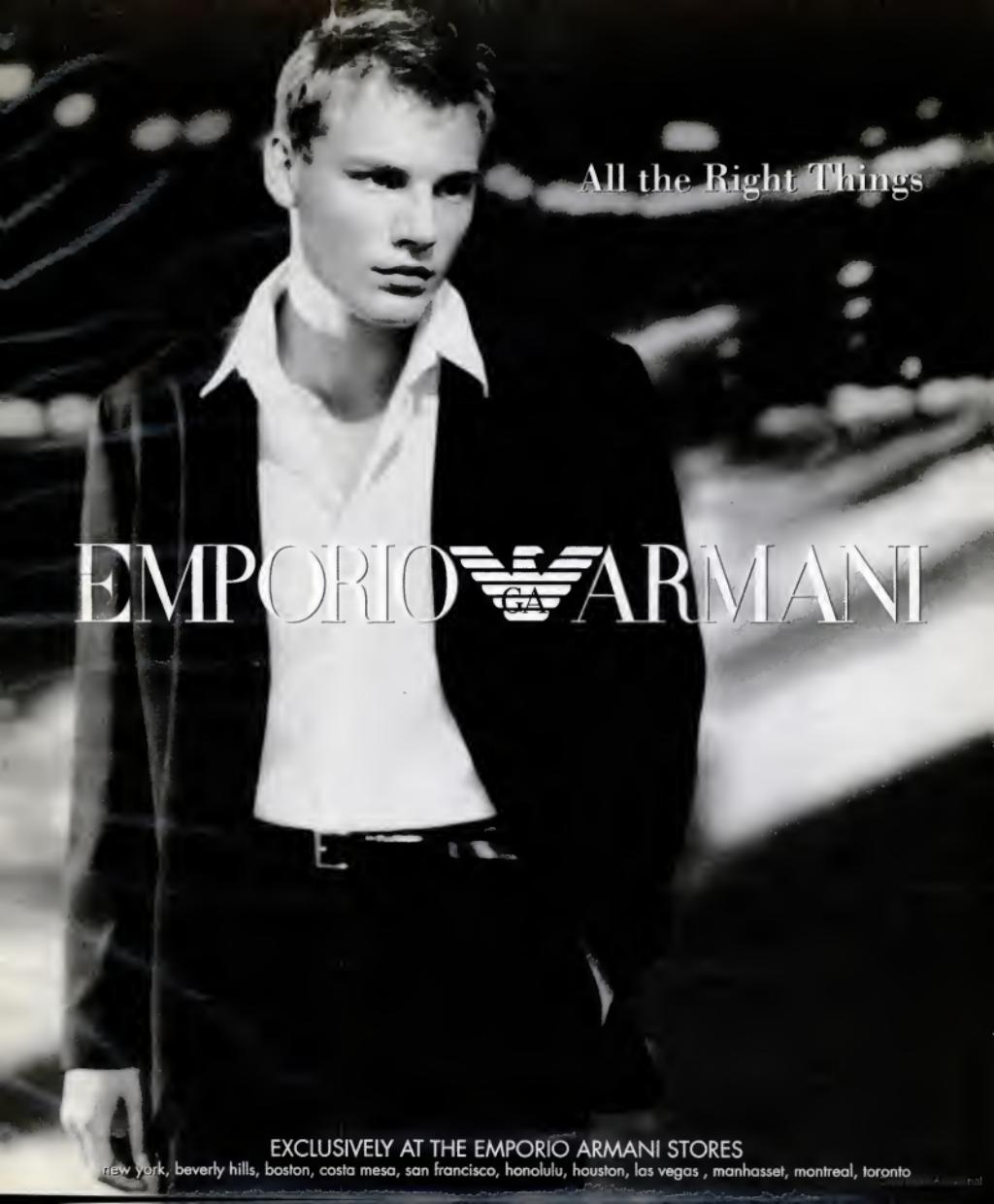
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contents

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 4 APRIL 1998

FEATURES

70 MADONNA CHOOSES DARE

A 39-year-old mom discusses why she just made the most daring record of her career. **By Barry Walters** Plus: the making of *Ray of Light*. And: 12 angry ravers put Madonna to the cred test. **By Victoria DeSilverio**

80 ONE-HIT WONDERLAND

They start out as catchy little tunes you hear on the radio until you want to take a gun and blow that Merc Playground guy's head off his laconic little shoulders. **By Jane Dark**

82 MEATY, BEATY, BIG AND BOUNCY

Britain's Big Beat revolution may just bring back rock'n'roll hedonism. **By Tony Marcus** Plus: essential Big Beat. **By Simon Reynolds** And: Are Propellerheads the Prodigy of 1998? **By Sylvia Patterson**

92 GIVE THE STRUMMER SOME

Elliott Smith and Mary Lou Lord talk songwriting, compromising for radio play, and being sex symbols but in a sensitive, non-threatening sorta way.

94 FASHION KOLD KRUSH THREADS

Photographs by Jamil G.S. **Return of the B-Boy:** the sudden vogue for all things Ghetto 1982. **By Chris Norris** Plus: a break-dancing cosmology. **By Cheo Hodari Coker**

102 INDIE MOVIES—

NOW MORE THAN EVER!

Independent film is following the arc of alt-rock: an insurgent movement that takes over only to be co-opted by The Man. **By Maureen Callahan**

110 THE PIRATE WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

A South Seas pirate named Rambo seems to be the stuff of legend. Until you meet him. **By Denis Johnson**

116 THE PROFESSIONAL LESBIAN

Chastity Bono is the most powerful gay activist in Hollywood and a better politician than her dad ever was. **By Erik Himmelsbach**

118 THE DOG ATE MY HARD DRIVE

Disney's fabled retro-community, Celebration, happens to have the most wired school in America. **By David Kushner**



Madonna: *Not serious about this* *new* *thing*. *This* *photograph* and *cover* *by* *James* *Kalnay* *and* *Vinoodh* *Matadin*.

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30
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Inertia™ W2708



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Rituals™ W2793



HighStreet™ W2840



SideStreet™ W2850

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COLUMNS

33 GOING POSTAL

Plus: PMS Boy cuts Biggie down to size.

41 EXPOSURE

Curve; R&B plays seating chart; are *Tele-tubbies* cutting-edge art?; Nietzsche vs. Alanis; Chow Yun-Fat vs. Takeshi Kitano; Bran Van 3000; Cappadonna; Adx Rose: The Musical; Lil' Biggie and Lil' Puffy talk.

54 PRODUCT

Auto tracking system vs. super-intimate peephole, cleanliness next to everything, skinny ties redux.

INCONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION: Recycling the symbol. By Paul Lukas

58 POP LIFE

CONTENT PROVIDER: Like Belushi and Candy, Chris Farley did the fat-guy-falls-down gag one too many times. The audience laughed until he died. **By Tad Friend**
MOVIES: The kids next door on a big screen near you. **By Steve Erickson**

64 SOUNDBITES

Whattus with that long-promised Guns N' Roses album? Public Enemy regroups, Kula Shaker goes raga, and Lauryn Hill enters the studio. HUSH HUSH The battle over Madonna's Maverick Records; the hysterical grab for the *South Park* soundtrack. By Joe Fleischer ASSEMBLY LINE The Artist Formerly Known as Prince goes way beyond indie. By Keith Moerer

123 REVIEWS

Killah Priest, the Lox by **Sasha Frere-Jones** Plus: Scott Weiland, Jerry Cantrell, Hepcat, Dropkick Murphys, Silver Apples, Adam N to X, Kristin Hersh, the High Llamas, Robert Wyatt, more. BEATS AND BYTES Chain Reaction's ultra-minimalist house. By Simon Reynolds SINGLES Pearl Jam, Queen Pen, etc. By **Charles Aaron** WORDS AND GUITARS: Why post-rock can't move the crowd. By **Rob Michaels**

136 GENIUS LESSONS

Genasaurs wrecks. By Sean Landers



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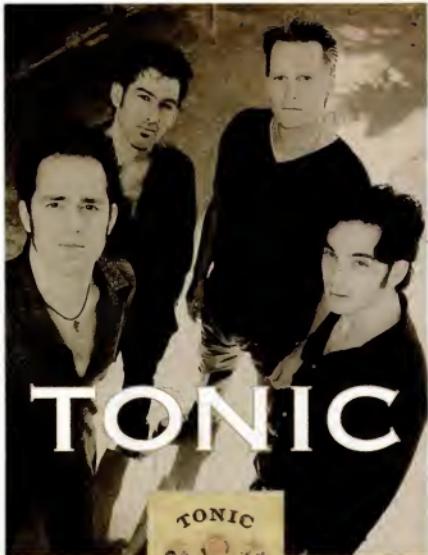


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contributors

"Never bring your credit cards or weapons when going to meet a pirate," advises novelist **Denis Johnson**, who risked life and limb to meet with modern-day Filipino buccaneers for the feature "The Pirate With Low Self-Esteem." But the swashbucklers the Californian encountered on the Sulu Sea weren't of the Captain Morgan ilk: "The pirates actually turned out to be pretty nice," says Johnson. "If you met them on the street, you wouldn't be able to tell they were pirates." Johnson is the author of the short story collection, *Jesus Son* (HarperPerennial), and, most recently, the novel *Already Dead* (HarperCollins).

According to Dutch photographers **Inez van Lamsweerde** and **Vinoodh Matadin**, who shot Madonna for this month's cover story "Madonna Chooses Dare," the Material Girl is consulting a higher source for fashion advice these days—her one-year-old daughter, Lourdes. "Madonna showed all her clothes to Lourdes and asked her if she liked the dress she was wearing," recalls van Lamsweerde. "Lourdes would say, 'No,' but Madonna says she's just at an age where she says no to everything." The Dutch duo also shoot for the *Face* and *Vogue*.

Spin Contributing Editor **Maureen Callahan** compares the demise of independent film to the ruin of indie rock in this month's feature "Indie Movies—Now More Than Ever!" "There's been a slew of *Pulp Fiction* rip-offs that have been foisted upon us," says Callahan, "and they all come with the requisite Robert Rodriguez I-sold-my-body-to-science-to-make-this-film thing." Callahan, who has written for *Sassy*, *New York*, and *MTV*, may be found armed to the hilt and high on drugs, chasing a bag of nebulous contents cross-country, while a cool '70s soundtrack plays in the background.

With a press badge tucked in the brim of his fedora and a handful of Mickeys to give his adversaries the slip, **Spin's** intrepid music industry gumshoe **Joe Fleischer** is off in hot pursuit of another lead in order to give you, dear reader, the inside dirt in his monthly column, "Hush Hush." "I think *perle* is a strong word," exclaims Fleischer. "Media parasite is probably a more accurate description of what I do." Off the record, however, Fleischer is a senior editor at *HiT* magazine and cohosts the nationally syndicated radio show *Live From the Pit*.

Why better to shoot this month's fashion story ("Kold Krush Threads") than **Jamil G.S.**, a Danish photographer who also DJs and used to break-dance. "I started break-dancing in Copenhagen when I was 12," says Jamil G.S. "I used to do the electric boogie, the spider, and the headspin but I didn't use cardboard...so I never did it outside." Jamil G.S. also shoots for *I.D.*, the *Face*, *Trace*, and *George*.

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Whether you were female or male, black or white, money or no money, Biggie made you feel his every emotion.

—J. D. Harrell

The Free Is Mine | Letter of the Year



The Notorious B.I.G.

Before his death became an icon for low-key '90s and Police careers, Biggie became the life of the hip-hop party, no shittin' business. Here's a look at his life, from his days as a teen to his death, and the musical legacy of Christopher Wallace.



Tears of the Clowns

Mike Rubin and Merk Dencay are right about the Insene Clown Posse ("Down With the Clowns," January): Like Al Jolson and company, they're ripping off black culture—and not even doing it well. Maybe Elvis didn't hide his racist tendencies, but at least he could rock. The Beastie Boys respect the integrity of black music, contributing admirably to both hip-hop and rock. The Beatles have thus earned the respect of their African-American peers, unlike the inane clown poseurs.

Daniel Brzenoff
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

If ICP are racists, why do they tour with Myzer, a Puerto Rican artist from New York who has also been signed to their label? Referring to

the band as "über-wiggers" in your table of contents—a racist term—only adds to the idiocy and hypocrisy.

Ken Wood
Brockton, Massachusetts

ICP has always publicly stood *against* racism—listen to songs such as "Rebel Flag," "Chicken Huntin'," and "Piggy Pie." Anyone who has heard ICP even once knows they are the most anti-racist band on the planet.

Patrick Shemel
St. Louis, Missouri

ICP are intellectual masterminds conveying positive messages to the youngsters in the world today. So you will get your butt pried by the wicked clowns of the Dark Carnival. They will bust you in the head with a two-liter bottle of Arctic Sun Faygo! They will Sabu your ass through a rusty, barbed-

wire-wrapped table and stomp your head, bells, end ass crack, 'cause the Ninjas and Clowns are down 4 life!

Chris Toombs
Glen Mills, Pennsylvania

I am a 43-year-old, white, female office worker. My clown name is Choko. How low and deplorable to even mention minstral blackface, as if it is the derivation for ICP. Sheggy 2 Dope and Violent J sport clown-face drawn from the traditional trap style, and they carry on a great tradition of social commentary in that guise. There is no way the Clowns could not have sprung full-blown from the half-broken collective consciousness of my hometown, this mixed-race, working-poor union town.

Karen S. Makale
Hazel Park, Michigan

Where the hell do you get that ICP fans are from the suburbs? I bet you 99 percent of all Juggalos are from the muthafuckin' ghetto!!!

Robert Aoudad
Toledo, Ohio

Mike Rubin and Mark Dencay respond: Obviously, our comic touched a guilty nerve among Insene Clown Posse fans. Careful readers of "Down With the Clowns" will note that the words "racist" and "wigger" (a term neither of us endorse) do not appear anywhere within our story. All the dialogue in this article was reprinted verbatim from the Detroit show we attended and we portrayed visually only what the two of us actually saw. Of the roughly 40 ICP "juggalos" we

interviewed, not a single one was from the actual city of Detroit—much like Violent J and Sheggy 2 Dope themselves, who attended high school in suburban Ferndale. The fans we captured all fall from such "ghettos" as Roseville, Westland, and Mt. Clemens. Lastly, while ICP fans are quick to defend their beloved clowns from any potential inference of intolerance, the tone of the spate of letters, profane phone messages, and misspelled Internet ramblings delivered in response to the comic has been overwhelmingly homophobic and misogynistic. ICP even saw fit to use their "Wicked Web Site" as a launching pad for threats of physical harm against us, considerably ironic coming from supposed First Amendment martyrs. Last time we checked, incitement to violence was neither free nor protected speech. See you in the funny pages.

Bigger Than Life

Thank you for realizing that the Notorious B.I.G. ("Artist of the Year," cover, January) paved the way for rap's current pop success. Because of his outstanding talent, he interested many rock fans in what rap has to say.

Maureen Prewitt
Greenwich, Connecticut

As a rap fan, I think you made an outstanding decision in making the Notorious B.I.G. your Artist of the Year. Whether you were female or male, black or white, money or no money, Biggie made you feel his every emotion. There are plenty of

spinonline

En Vogue SPINonline is proud to announce the launch of *Spin Style Online*, your guide to rock-star fashion. Freaky-styley former *Storm Temple* Pilots frontman Scott Weiland kicks off the feature with a look inside his closet, and we also profile the red-hot hip-hop line FUBU. Check out *Alt*.Media for details.

Duke of Earls In a recent SPINonline interview,

cleaned-up country rocker Steve Earle talks about "Nashville suicide weather," new country's Air Supply connection, and the joys of playing gigs for ten dollars. Log on March 17 for the whole scoop.

The SPINdex Poll After reading our Madonna cover story, sequester yourself in our digital rec room with a soundclip from Madonna's *Ray of Light* and answer

our summons to appear as one of 12 Miffed Cyber-Jurors. Send your critiques and a 1-5 rating to SPINtronic@eol.com and we'll post the 12 best responses at *Alt*.media.

The Sound Off For our Online Music Awards survey, we asked all the important questions about the sights and sounds of 1997—your favorite artists, albums, etc. But our readers were

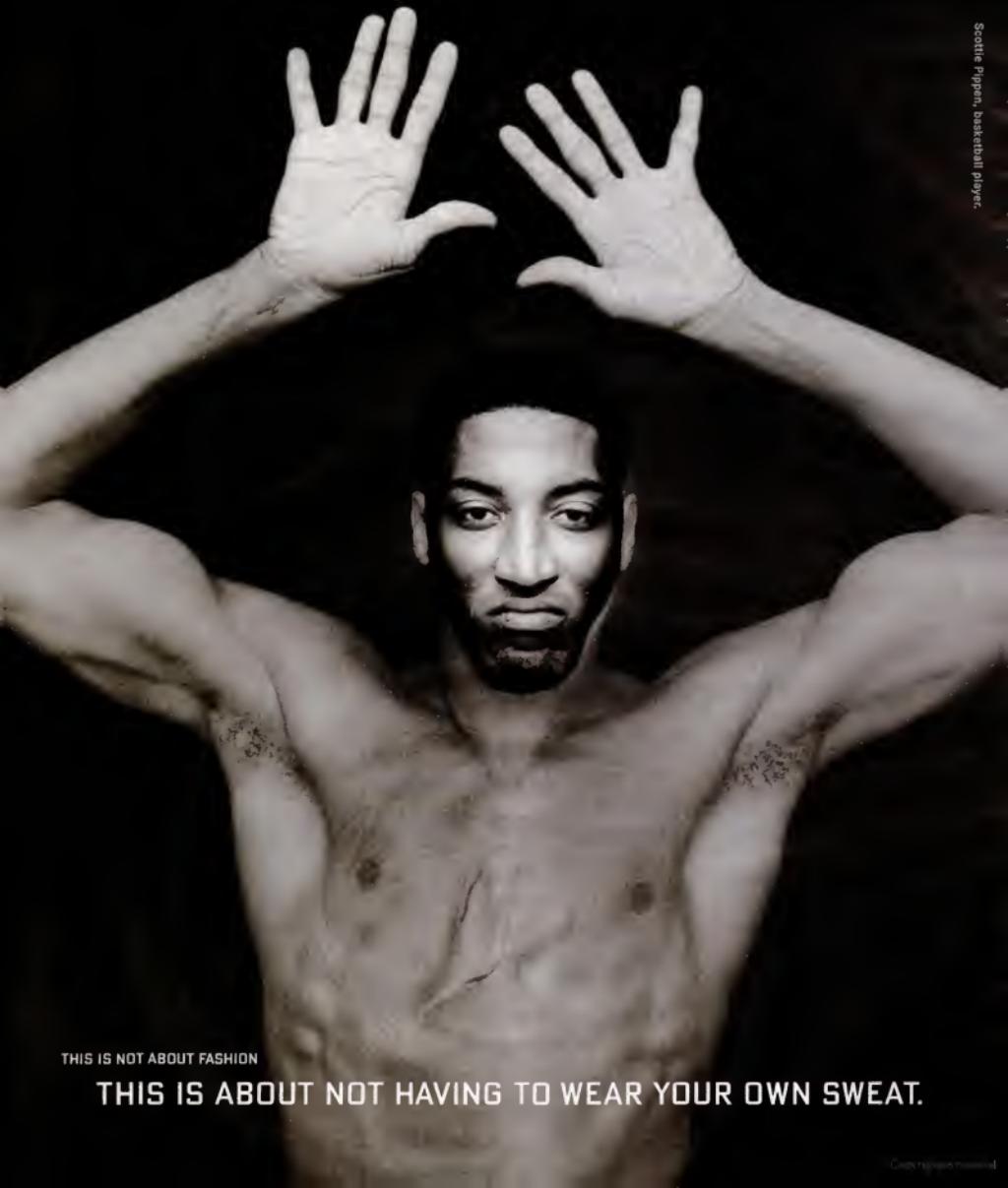
apparently most interested in the very timely query, "Who deserved a good peddling?" Mariah Carey beat front-runners Liam Gallagher and Fiona Apple by a landslide, leading a Mariah apologist to grouse, "Everyone knows that she is the best artist ever! Mariah should smack you until her hand hurts...then smack you again for making it hurt!" Your Hickory switch or ours?

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Shut up, little man: The crank returns

My mama always said, "Hip-hop is like McDonald's. Every nigga wants to get franchised." I'm sure the Notorious B.I.G. packed away equal amounts of street knowledge and Big Macs before his stellar rise in the B-Boy Kingdom, but it seems a bit lame to slap an "Artist of the Year" [cover, January] label on a performer whose success hinged neither on uncanny lyrical gymnastics (i.e., the Wu-Tang Clan), nor on landing alien arias on terra firma (à la Björk), nor even on maintaining artistic control of his own "product." Biggie's claim to fame is the same as that of 99.9 percent of rap artists sitting on the shelves today: He managed to flip nothin' into somethin' and make that ol' Escape from Ghettopedia.

So what makes His Royal Bigness the premier artist of the last 365 days? Even "Hypnotize" is merely a piece of rump-shakin' funk designed to centerpiece an album whose side dishes (i.e., Puffy, Lil' Kim, et al.) should be doggy-bagged and forced to death. You clearly understand the predictability of *Life After Death*, citing it as the "sound of hip-hop backing down another dead end." But fuck the seven shots heard 'round the world: What did Biggie's music do for the good of 1997? Says Charles Aaron: "[D]ramatized the limits of pop better than any album in 1997." **WHAT?!** *The limits of pop?!* If you can tell me when the hell anyone ever celebrated pop for enforcing limits, I will pour out a 40 oz. in your honor, Chuckie.

So beyond *Spin's* desperate need to find a Platinum-selling star capable of pushing covers in these third-eye-blind times, why *Biggie's*? (Thank God Princess Di didn't release a collection of Third World nursery rhymes before her high-speed demapping.) At least Biggie's shooter had to listen to Puffy "rap" for the past ten months. Damn—I guess the punishment does fit the crime after all.

Stayin' alive,

Tony Stockton
Roanoke, Virginia

greet rappers with powerful stories to tell, but no one else possesses such spirit—or realness.

J. D. Herrell
Perry, Georgia

It's a shame when anyone gets gunned down in the prime of his career, but does that automatically make him Artist of the Year? The Notorious B.I.G. was one of the most gifted rappers around, but if you're besing the honor on his recordings, he should have received it back in 1994 with the release of *Ready to Die*—a much better album musically and conceptually than *Life After Death*. Granted, 1997 wasn't exactly a groundbreaking year in music, but I'm sure you could have come up with someone a little more deserving.

Jeffrey S. Williams
Danville, Illinois

The Notorious B.I.G. was about as vibrant and original a hip-hop artist as Another Bad Creation. For a musical gang that is woefully unoriginal and stagnant to begin with, Biggie's records were like watching *The Real World* reruns for the 56th time. To even compare him to truly gifted legends such as Marvin Gaye and Kurt Cobain is utterly laughable.

Carlos Gonzalez
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Gracing magazine covers with dead people as a gimmick to sell issues is getting a little old.

Michael Bohler
Lebanon, Ohio

I find it interesting that your picks for Artist (Notorious B.I.G.), Band (Radiohead), and Album (Cornershop's *When I Was Born for the 7th Time*) of the Year weren't deemed worthy of your "40 Most Vital Artists in Music" issue last April.

Eva Stahlberger
Briarcliff, New Jersey

Radio Waves

What a delightful surprise to see Radiohead named Band of the Year [January]. At least the members of one English band don't feel obliged to act like jackassas upon becoming successful.

Kasay Viles
Lansing, Michigan

Pat Blesch's Radiohead article is truly wicked. Now the world has a little better understanding of why Radiohead are a bunch of ganas. For instance, Thom York is an anigma to the fullest extent of the word. He confuses and intrigues us, and fear of what we don't understand is what

draws most of us to his band.

Shiloh Palomino
Newport News, Virginia

Death Trip 2000

I can't believe you had the audacity to ask music stars the question, "Is rock dead?" ("Survey Says," January). I think the public has already answered that question. If bands like Prodigy and the Chemical Brothers are so amazing, where are the record sales to prove they are replacing rock? Metallica outsold the Chemical Brothers in less than two weeks, and both Radiohead and Oasis were two of *Spin's* most celebrated artists in '97. Rock is still everywhere, even if some of today's musicians blend it with other genres.

Spencer Vliet
Northampton, Pennsylvania

How incredibly stupid to ask if rock is dead. There are thousands of bands out there screaming "Fuck no!"—you just don't cover them anymore. You need to get back in touch with your readership—we are primarily alt/rock/electronics fans.

Shawn Lynch
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Sour Times

Eric Weisbard's "Reasons to Be Cheerful" [assay] (January) actually makes me feel worse about the music of 1997 than I already did. Here are some of the reasons why it sucks: Blind faith in electronica as the savior of music. Puff Daddy's fascination with other people's songs. Bush's shameless copying of Nirvana, the constant capitalizing on other people's deaths—in other words, a total lack of musical revolutionaries.

Sara Williams
Penfield, New York

Tommy 2 Tones

The ska section of your "Stereo Types" roundup [January] was obviously a joke. Listing Smash Mouth and Sugar Ray—two bands who aren't even remotely ska—is the dead giveaway. The subhead should have read, "A handful of Orange County, California, pop/punk bands that implement a ska beat in some of their tunes." Very funny, Spin.

Allen Bell
Sarasota, Florida

Once again, you shamelessly paint ska as a veritable musical wasteland with nothing of substance to offer. Once again you featured the same non-acts and called them ska. Obviously no one in your office bothered to do anything but listen to the

radio as research for this wax job. That's fine. But to say that Sugar Ray's "Fly" was "practically this genre's defining moment" is just plain ignorant.

Richard Sanchez
Yucca Valley, California

Top of the Flops

I don't know everything about U2, but I do know that neither *Pop* nor the recent *PopMart* tour are "flops" ("No Money, No Problems," January). Not only has *Pop* sold millions, but Bono and company are still performing to sell-out crowds. And didn't *Spin* rate *Pop* a "9" in the April '97 issue?

Candice Bartlett
Euclid, Ohio

How was *U2* a flop of 1997—creatively or financially? I would not call a tour that has grossed over 100 million dollars a financial failure, and I would not say that *Pop*, which features some of the band's most soul-searching lyrics ever, is a creative failure.

Peter Spack
St. Louis, Missouri

No Speed Racer

Who cares about two guys racing cars in the desert? ("Speed Freaks," January)? If I were you, I'd be trying to inform people about important issues like rape, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy. But in lieu of your old "AIDS: Words From the Front" column, we learn where to buy a yellow Dries Van Noten coat that costs only \$998. Sorry, *Spin*, I can't renew my subscription because I had to buy a \$1,523 Raf Simons coat to keep warm while listening to my favorite dead rapper, the Notorious B.I.G.

Tom Maloy
Hawthorne Park, Illinois

Beat Here Now

I, for one, would like to see that always angry letter-writer Tony Stockton try to kick Oesia's asses "like it's 1776" ("Going Postal, January). It will be a sad day in Manchester when the Gallagher brothers can't kick the shit out of a whiny, please-give-me-my-15-minutes-of-fame stoatard like him. Tony, why don't you just stop complaining every month to cover up your own shortcomings and leave the rest of us to enjoy our *Spin* in peace?

Katie Wasilewski
North Syracuse, New York

Writs Going Postal, 6 West 18th Street, New York, NY 10011. e-mail: spinonline@aol.com. Always include your full name and phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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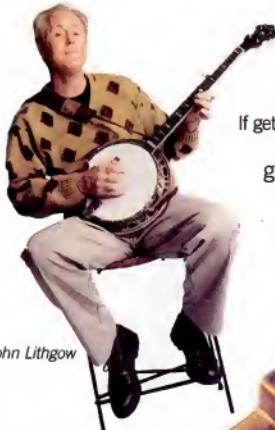
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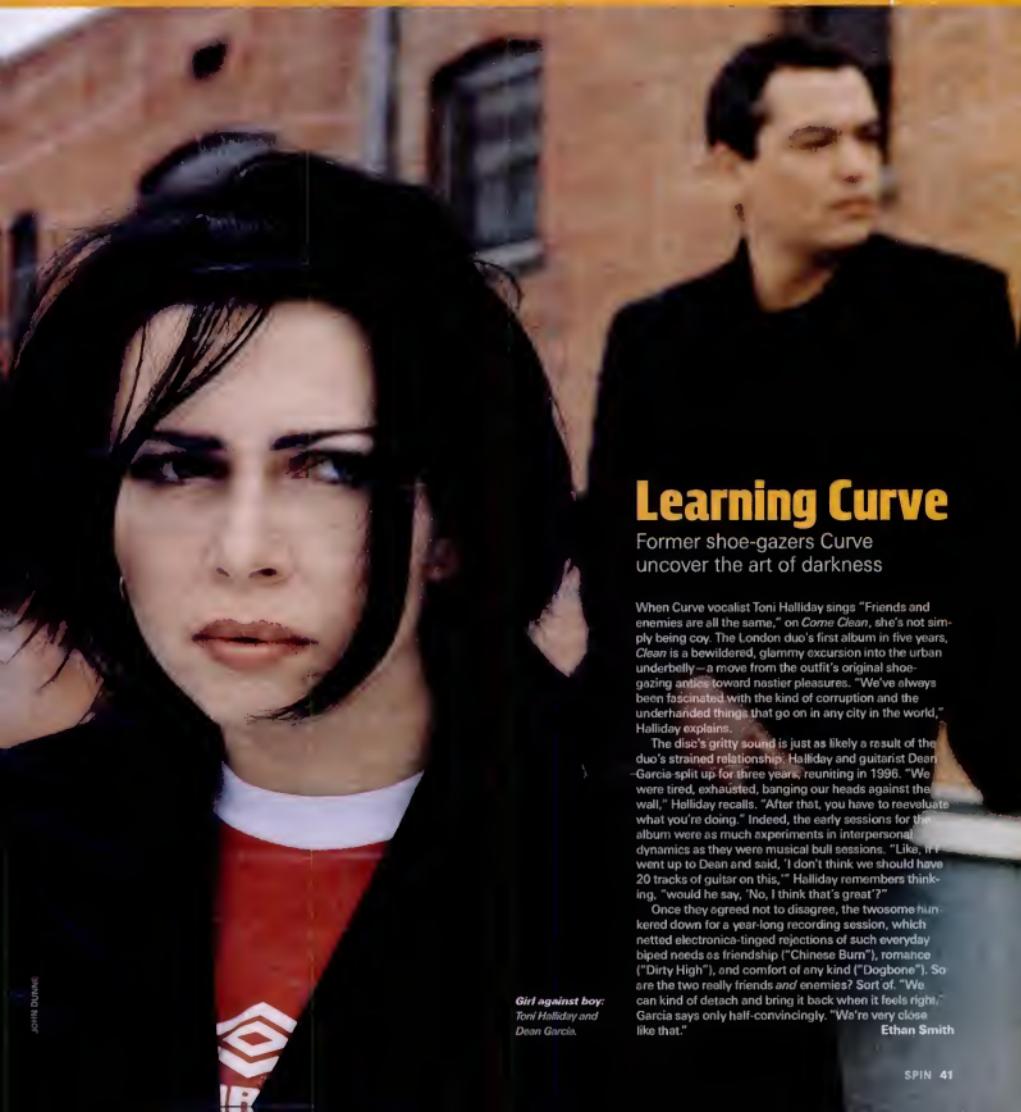
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Learning Curve

Former shoe-gazers Curve uncover the art of darkness

When Curve vocalist Toni Halliday sings "Friends and enemies are all the same," on *Come Clean*, she's not simply being coy. The London duo's first album in five years, *Clean* is a bewildered, giddy excursion into the urban underbelly—a move from the outfit's original shoe-gazing antics toward nastier pleasures. "We've always been fascinated with the kind of corruption and the underhanded things that go on in any city in the world," Halliday explains.

The disc's gritty sound is just as likely a result of the duo's strained relationship. Halliday and guitarist Dean Garcia split up for three years, reuniting in 1996. "We were tired, exhausted, banging our heads against the wall," Halliday recalls. "After that, you have to reevaluate what you're doing." Indeed, the early sessions for the album were as much experiments in interpersonal dynamics as they were musical bull sessions. "Like, if I went up to Dean and said, 'I don't think we should have 20 tracks of guitar on this,'" Halliday remembers thinking, "would he say, 'No, I think that's great?'"

Once they agreed not to disagree, the two somehun-
kered down for a year-long recording session, which netted electronica-tinged rejections of such everyday biped needs as friendship ("Chinese Burn"), romance ("Dirty High"), and comfort of any kind ("Dogbone"). So are the two really friends and enemies? Sort of. "We can kind of detach and bring it back when it feels right," Garcia says only half-convincingly. "We're very close like that."

Ethan Smith

Girl against boy:
Toni Halliday and
Dean Garcia

112 PUFFY
CONNECTION: Bad Boy's B2K II Men, B2K, and B2K II
JIGGY ODUENTÉ: 5 No monster single, but question on all: Who's the real Bad Boy? Missing You," one Top 5 single

Brain McKnight
PUFFY CONNECTION
predicted it! "You Shouldn't Be With Him (Don't Waste Your Time)" BIG HIT
Top Single
Missy Elliott
JIGGY ODUENTÉ: 3 Points for Muse came on single

Faith Evans PUFFY
CONNECTION: the number-one R&B hit, "I'll Be Missing You" (Puffy's No Way)

Total PUFFY
CONNECTION: Bad Boy's Bad Girls, BIG HIT: "What About Us" (Puffy's No Way)
TNAK & PUFFY: guiding their crew: Missy & Timbaland are responsible for their horns and bass

PUFFY

Produces, performs, makes exec-
utive decisions, and extends the lifespan of his
catalogue with his sopho-
more constructed
remixes, just when you're getting
tired of the original
Bad Boy ensemble, a whole new crew
of signees are ready to drop

Lil' Kim, PUFFY
CONNECTION: Mallory to his
Mickey BIG HIT:
"I'll Be Missing You" (Puffy's No Way)

JIGGY ODUENTÉ:
10 turned the
celebrity cameo
game, showing up on
songs by Usher,

SWV, Mary J.
Blige, and Puff Daddy

Macy, the Nation-
als B.I.G., Jay-Z,
and Dr. Dre, all
achieved mas-
sive success by
remixing songs
from Dr. Dre and
Busta Rhymes in the
"Benjamins" rock
remix video

SWV PUFFY
CONNECTION: He
produced and
appeared in the
video for their single
"Sometime" (Puffy's
No Way)

JIGGY ODUENTÉ:
7.5 Her Butterfly
remix video
came from Dr. Dre and
Busta Rhymes in the
"Benjamins" rock
remix video

LSS PUFFY CONNEC-
TION: He produced and
appeared in the
video for "You Get
It" for expedient collab-
oration of aging
Nas and Dr. Dre, while
Gerald Levert, Keith
Swazi, and Johnny
Gill join in "My
Baby JIGGY
ODUENTÉ: 5 Pulled
out all the stops in a celebrity cameo
from Dr. Dre, Busta Rhymes, Missy
Elliott, Faith Evans,
and Coke from SWV

PUFFY'S TABLE

CONNECTIONS:
Puff Daddy, Dr. Dre,
R. Kelly, Jimmy
Jane & Terry
Loredo, Trick Daddy,
Lil' Kim, Benji
Duper, and Nelly
"Hot Goss" City
JIGGY ODUENTÉ:
10 The last season
of big-boy beef, once
changed when the Web's to
a firebrand during
an interview, later
settled in charm
mode

MARY J.
BLIGE'S TABLE

Glorious, MISSY &
TIMBALAND CONNEXION: The
producer produced his
album, *Glorious*, for
Mary J. Blige, BIG HIT:
"I'll Be Missing You" (Puffy's No Way)
JIGGY ODUENTÉ:
7 Appear on
"I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), and "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way Out), and/or
sell-out tour

MISSY ELLIOTT & TIMBALAND

Most recognizable signature on and since Dr. Dre's award-
winning signatures and since Missy took the ultrares-
onance parameters of R&B穿衣ing, but head-
banging, and dancing, and then added a whole new level of
collaboration and dancing freak in *Missy & Timbaland*.

Play MISSY &
TIMBALAND
CONNECTION:
MBT's mama
"I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), and "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way Out), and/or
sell-out tour

MISSY &
TIMBALAND'S TABLE

Allyah, MISSY &
TIMBALAND CONN-
EXION: They wrote and
produced the title track
on their *One in a Million*
album #NOHIT: "The
One I Gave My Heart
To" (MBT's No Way)
#NOHIT: "The One I Gave My
Heart To" (MBT's No Way)
#NOHIT: "The One I Gave My
Heart To" (MBT's No Way)
#NOHIT: "The One I Gave My
Heart To" (MBT's No Way)

Marquise MISSY &
TIMBALAND
CONNECTION:
"I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way), and "I'm a Believer" (Puffy's
No Way Out), and/or
sell-out tour

john mcknight / san francisco, california



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ME OUTDOORS. IT'S REALLY AN
AFFIRMATION OF MYSELF."

"I'M OUT THERE
EVERY WEEKEND."

IT'S ALL

Teletubthumping

Teletubbies: super-furry animals of the avant-garde?

It had to happen sometime: *Teletubbies*, a wildly popular live-action British kids' show coming to PBS this month, is the first TV show explicitly designed for one-year-olds. But in England, the program attracts viewers of all ages, from teenage ravers to pop-obsessed academics, for one very specific reason: Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa, and Po are truly TV playmates for the information age. Here's how the Tubbies make Barney look like a dinosaur.

David A. Greene

They're cyborgs: All four Tubbies have TV screens embedded in their plush, Technicolor bellies.

They exist in the fourth dimension: Like virtual-reality avatars, the Tubbies have no discernable size. (The actors' real-life heights are a closely held secret.)

Real people, though, exist only on video: Once in a while, little humans will appear on the Tubbies' belly-screens. Like CU-SeeMe cyberbuddies, they're amusing, but you don't have to worry about them actually coming to your house.

They really like TV: Teletubbyland is the place "where television comes from." Accordingly, video is like coverage of Clinton sex scandals: ubiquitous and heavily consumed.

They submit narrative: The video clips on the Tubbies' tummies repeat themselves, rather than tell a story. (Stoners tend to dig this part of the show.)



Techno-tubbies Laa-Laa, Po, and Tinky Winky.

say all marketing their wares to veterinarians. According to the San Francisco Examiner, one Kansas-based vet mediates a shocking 10 percent of his patients. Let's just hope Elizabeth Wurtzel's bizarre case can't type.

→ While the psychological travails of pets are such that more and more of them are

being subjected to our own dubious cures, man remains the undisputed king of the jungle when it comes to psychoses, neuroses, and disturbances of the mind. To wit: muscle dysmorphia, a bodily identified with the human male, has told the New York Times earlier this year. But if you ask us, Dr. Harmon Pope of McLean Hospital in Boston, maintains itself as a preoccupation with

bodybuilding so severe it's often sacrifice careers, relationships, social engagements, and normal neck-size-to-head-size ratios in these efforts to bulk up. "Muscle dysmorphia may become the body-image disorder of the future," Pope told the *New York Times* earlier this year. But if you ask us, Dr. Pope sounds like some puny-

meek pencil pusher with a overly large head and a traumatic beach pressing incident in his past. See you at the gym, puny!

→ There's a tender side to the well-maligned practice of animal sex, as this zoophile reveals, post-breakup, on his home page. "As I may have mentioned, Sugar was the

They play with identity: Tinky Winky, the biggest Teletubby, is a male who loves to carry a handbag. It doesn't mean he's gay, exactly—just different.

And they think spoken language is overrated: The Tubbies vocabulary consists solely of nonsensical songs and words like "nice" and "agein." Spoken language means structure, which means authority—a threat to the Tubbies' blissful technocracy.

But above all, technology is their toy: The Teletubbytronic Superdome—the Teletubbies' subterranean, grass-covered playhouse—is stuffed full of electronic equipment, just like Steve Jobs's grotto. **Which is why kids dig them:** "To adults, *Teletubbies* looks surreal," says Kevin Nealon, the show's U.S. distributor. "But to children growing up with technology, it's a very nurturing thing."

The New Prime Rate



Sheryl Crow



k.d. lang

So much for Girl Power. It turns out older women have the real juice. According to a report recently published by the Brand Futures Group, "an intelligence unit specializing in interpreting trends," women now reach their "absolute power" and "[highest] desirability" at the robust age of 36. The marketing outfit, which dispenses its wisdom to such clients as Ford and Sears, claims that, with "youth" now extending into early middle age, the newly empowered pigtails and Hard Candy set will soon be eclipsed by the "much more sexy Princess Diana archetype."

While this is good news for 36-year-old VH-1 regulars such as Sheryl Crow and k.d. lang, the new market-sanctioned female paradigm could be a real boon for guys. "The Lolita goddess will be competing with her mother for a share of men's interest," says BPG head Marian Salzman, who predicts we'll see more "mature woman/young stud relationships." In other words, yes, dude, Mrs. Robinson is trying to seduce you.

Shoshana Berger

last house I truly felt at home was a combination of my internal growth and her beautiful personality. She meant a lot to me from the first time I met her, and I like to think that our friendship means something to her as well."

→ While the job-star and park industr

ies had been reeling from the claim of a second-pantless (an out-of-court agreement will allow both groups access to the phrase "white meat," pork being the "other white meat," and lobster being the "ultimate white meat"), the two poultry workers awoke to their elbows in a tussle over getting to





Get in touch with your masculine side.



Guns for Hire

The gangster lean of Hong Kong and Japanese mobsters

Just as John Woo effectively created the modern Hong Kong gangster film with his 1986 breakthrough, *A Better Tomorrow*, so, a year later, did actor/writer/director Takeshi Kitano invent its Japanese equivalent, the *yakuza* film, with *Sonatine*. But while Woo's *The Killer* and *Hard-Boiled* quickly went from international festival to U.S. art house, Kitano's work is only now surfacing Stateside. Two of Kitano's films will hit theaters this month—*Sonatine* features him as a worn-out gangster caught in the middle of a turf war; and in *Hana-Bi* (Fireworks), he plays a deadbeat cop who robs a bank. Meanwhile in Takeshi's just-released *Gorin*, Kitano shows up as a grim-faced, relentless killing machine. So what separates a triad cowboy from a yakuzza hawky? Here, a guide to the two brands of mayhem. Andy Klein



Gang bangers:
left, Hong Kong idol Chow Yun-Fat; right,
Japanese auteur Takeshi Kitano.

the pink of the "real" white meat. The winters, whose job it is to determine the weather, have been reportedly replaced en masse by South Korean immigrants. The Australian company says the Korean "chicken servers" are only trainees, meant to correct the local error rate (which, for reasons that elude both the

Australians and us, is doubtless the result of the "real" white meat).

► The new isn't all bad for San Francisco's beleaguered homeless population. This winter saw the opening of a \$1 million, 27,000-square-foot shelter, complete with paintings, sky-lights, throw rugs, and in-room televisions. Unfortunately, 50

percent of the beds are reserved for dogs, the other 50 percent for cats. At the Midlife of the Adoption Center, the local SPCA houses the "usual cyclone fence or cinder-block walls" that have been replaced by miniature replicas "representing typical San Francisco architecture," which face little

walkways like "Benji Boulevard" and "Snoopy Street." A more comfortable place to live will presumably be consistent with their "furry lots." Those who resemble "artsy lots" in San Francisco's bohemian district.

► *"As the slithereens at Spin proved with their December*

Japan

Cinematic Style



Japanese films are more realistic and arty. Even in the visually stunning genre, the yakuzza still look like scurvy.



The criminal equivalent of Japanese capitalists, cinematic triads are charming, devil-may-care outlaws who are as much entrepreneurs as they are for-lengers. Believers in honor among thieves, they're extremely loyal.



Yakuza firms round the old-fashioned way—one vertically positioned gun at a time. The shooter always has two feet firmly on the ground, and is usually filmed in the standard 24-frames-per-second.



Kiroro & Co. putt back and forth in sensible, fuel-efficient compacts. Chase scenes are nonexistent.



Looking like corporate middle managers, yakuzza bosses dress down to their business suits. Their underlings, meanwhile, are gap-toothed thugs whose fashion sense begins and ends with sleeveless T-shirts.



Depressingly, bravely suicidal, yakuzza would rather die in a private ritual than live in a world where honor is impossible.

1997 issue," begins a January 5 article in *Spin*, "it's a hoot to see the PETA logo on the cover. The treatment of Animals like a harp seal—especially when it comes to their sexually charged posters. But the fact that dozens of the world's sexiest celebrities continue to show their support for PETA by showing their skin proves that not everyone is as fucked up as Spin is." So true. The article goes on about the "cute" PETA logo, the "cute" pup, and then finishes with a "heh heh" and "Amen" (and Marc Herman [the author of the aforementioned Spin article?]). If he's so determined to have a meat-based diet, he's more than welcome to tickle our veggie-tanica dick." ♦



Micks-in-training: Lil' Puffy
(Jeremy Butler, left) and Lil' Biggie
(Conrad Sokalski).

Boy Wonders

The kiddie look-alikes of the Notorious B.I.G.'s "Sky's the Limit"

The star is dead, you've run out of stock footage, and the label wants to keep pumping out the videos: What's a director to do? Bring on the kiddie look-alikes, of course, which is what Spike Jonze opted for in the latest Notorious B.I.G. short, "Sky's the Limit." Discussed in Los

Angeles last fall, the pre-coocious dead ringer "Lil' Biggie" (Conrad Sokalski, 14) and "Lil' Puffy" (Jeremy Butler, 12) were plucked out of obscurity and plunged into pimpin's paradise for two whirlwind days of lip-synching, miming, and tail-sucking.

Did anyone ever tell you that you looked like Biggie before?

Lil' Biggie: People always used to tell me that. For the video, I made some study tapes so I could learn to act and talk like him. The second day I came up with a New York accent—it was just

crazy. Now everybody calls me "Biggie" in school. **What do you think is cool about Puffy?**

Lil' Puffy: He's like a cartoon character. I like the way he dances. Mainly I like Biggie, though. He always dressed in a fly suit.

What did you think of Spike Jonze?

Lil' Puffy: He doesn't drive no fancy car or wear good clothes, so you couldn't tell he was a director, but he

was really cool. He made sure we got to eat pizza before rehearsal.

Did the girls come after you when they saw you on TV?

LB: They were like, "You're really *cuteeeeeee!*"

LP: My phone was blowing up on the spot! Did you get to drink Cristal on the shoot?

LB: No.

Did you put your mack hand down?

LB: No.

Not even with the girl who played Lil' Kim?

LB: She was only eight! Did you get to keep those fly clothes?

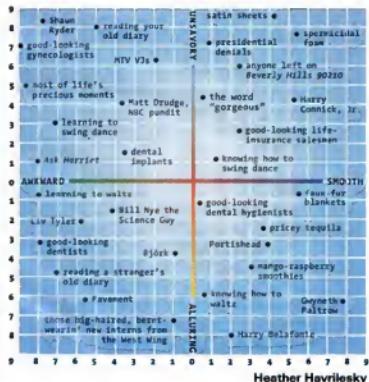
LB: I kept the fur. I wore it to a dance one day and people were like, "Wow!" They didn't believe it was real. **LP:** I kept the black suit and the gold necklace. I may need to get dressed up one day, you know?

Did you know each other before the video?

LP: The first time we met was at the shoot, and Conrad ended up sleeping over at my house that night. We're going to be as good friends as Biggie and Puffy were. **Sia Michel**

Polarity

Feeling awkward and unsavory?



The Great White Way

(Theater guy + Megadeth chords) x M.I.A. heavy metal hero = the forthcoming Axl Rose musical



Andy Prieboy is writing a musical. The show, tentatively titled *White Trash Wins Lotto*, is a satire based on the record industry in the 1980s and the life and times of Mr. W. Ad Rose. With songs like "Cocaine and Blowjobs," "I Think I Wrote a Symphony," and "Give 'Em the Meat" (in which Steven Tyler tells young Axl how to write a hit), the show follows our now-reclusive heavy metal hero from his arrival at the downtown L.A. Greyhound station to Guns N' Roses' triumphant 1989 appearance opening for the Rolling Stones.

The epiphany struck Prieboy (the guy who replaced Star Ridgewell in *Well of Voodoo*) after his record label, Dr. Dream, went belly-up two years ago. "I started thinking about those horrible, Megadeth, guitar-school chord progressions," says Prieboy. "And then I thought, 'What would happen if some theater twerp went to apply those chords to a story about heavy metal?'"

Just don't call it a rock opera. There is no rock 'n' roll, much less heavy metal, in *White Trash Wins Lotto*, which is tentatively slated for production next year. Instead, the tunes lean more toward Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. But who could play Ad on Broadway? Prieboy has his sights set on former grade-B teen idol Rex Smith. Smith says his rock roots (he toured with Ted Nugent and Lynyrd Skynyrd) give him unique insight into the sordid world of Axl Rose. "I look like a retired orthodontist now, but I've lived that life myself," he explains. "I rocked hard."

Erik Himmelsbach



Bran Power

Canada's Bran Van 3000 put the hip in hippity-pop

Photograph by James Smolka

"This guy once told me, 'I'm fat, I'm bald, I'm maniac-depressive, and your record makes me happy. And I don't mean in an Abba sense,'" James Di Salvio says this is the best thing anyone has ever said about his band, Bran Van 3000. "That's the kind of shit I love," Di Salvio adds. "And, for the record, I'm definitely down with Abba."

Di Salvio is the driving force behind Bran Van, a musical hydra from Montreal that chums out whimsical, knob-twiddling, hip-hop-laden pop. The group is more of a sprawling pan-musical collective than a traditional band; their debut record, *Glee*, features, among others, three bilingual female singers, two DJs, an MC, and a cellist.

"Word got around that I was recording stuff, and that anybody was welcome to come by," Di Salvio recalls, "and anybody did." More than 20 musicians, singers, and DJs, not to mention copious samples, eventually made the final cut. The result is Canada's first foray into the post-Beck universe. But abstract irony be damned, Bran Van 3000 (the name came to Di Salvio and bandmate E.P. "Electronic Pierre" Bergen during a marijuana-fueled rhyming session) oozes a wry, if not always deep, worldview that's best lebowed optimistic. "People can call us postmodern or whatever, but in essence, I'm a postmodern person...and that doesn't have to mean being bitter or jaded. Somebody once told me we did a good job of erasing the line between homage and parody. I took that as a great compliment."

It's no shock that the splicing-and-dicing Di Salvio first pursued a career as a filmmaker, directing several short films and music videos—as well as the video for the group's first single, "Drinking in L.A.," an arresting take on a gamut of hipster totems. "I think in scenes. Like, in film, if you went to scare the shit out of somebody, don't show a guy getting chased down an alley by a gunman. Put him on a suburban street in the middle of a sunny afternoon and create the feeling that somebody's watching him. You want to take a stab at a country song? Put it over a drum 'n' bass track, and just as the chorus is about to come in, cut to something else."

Drum 'n' bass? Country? So where does a Canadian get this stuff? "Montreal is a totally eclectic city," Di Salvio points out. "I mean, I grew up in love with the U.K. Subs and Eric B. & Rakim and French cabaret. People think the only thing Montreal has ever contributed to music is Leonard Cohen and that bassist from Hole."

Soon, Di Salvio will have an opportunity to play cultural ambassador, as the newly formed Bran Van 5ive outfit brings its shiny, happy pop south of the border. "Originally, I felt like the band was more like a cast, like some sort of *Cassavettes* creative family," he says of the group's early incarnations. "But now, I'm feeling more like a part of the Allman Brothers."

Zev Borow

Gang of four: Bran Van's core outfit, from left, Sarah Johnston, Jayne Hill, James Di Salvio, and E.P.



Cappadonna: hip-hop's new Don.

Mad Cap

Wu-Tang's Cappadonna steps up to the mike

Name: Cappadonna

A.K.A.: Cappachino, Donald Cappa Goines, Dart Thrasher. "I have many names," he says, "and even more styles."

Position: the newest (tenthi) member of hip-hop's Microsoft, Wu-Tang Clan; the sixth with a solo spin-off effort

Album: Self-titled debut is typical Wu-Tang: sharp, funky beats augmented by gritty street reports on everything from respect to crime to the Almighty on High. The smoldering first single, "Slang Editorial," sums up his show-and-prove style: "I came to the fork in the road and went straight / Right out the crack vial to the Golden Gate...."

Why we care: Anything produced by RZA is going to kick it.

Hometown: Staten Island, NY

Previous occupation: Working as a security guard. "I got fired," Cappadonna admits. "It was too hot one day, the building didn't have any ventilation, and I wanted to wear a short-sleeved shirt instead of the regular uniform. They said no, so I left. But if that didn't happen, I probably wouldn't be here."

Philosophy (personal): "Everything about my life wasn't sugar and spice," he says, breaking into a Dr. Seuss flow. "Bad times last longer than good times, my friend. You can take that with you to the end. It's all right to take control, but never take the soul out the hole."

Philosophy (professional): "I want to touch man, woman, and child. Race, creed, and color. This is the dream I had. Martin Luther King died the same year I was born. So I got to keep the dream alive."

The bicoastal hip-hop head: "I lived in Los Angeles for three months working on *Wu-Tang Forever*. Before that, I'd never been away that long, unless I was locked up. It's like home. First thing I did when I got off the plane is call all my girls."

Why his girls don't know about one another: "I gotta let the truth out. I don't lie. I just didn't tell them. But you know what? If I tell them I didn't really say this, they're going to believe me anyway."

Cheo Hodari Coker

the mix

delivering the world
in 323 words or less

Tenacious D [TV show]

Two fat guys sing funny songs and say "motherfucker" a lot. Aus sporadically on HBO.

Bump Piercing [hip body totem]

The newest adventure in body mod: raised piercings planted beneath your skin. Undercover. Hygienic.

Teeth [novel]

Hugh Gallagher's trip through modern-day Gen-X life as told by a young writer. Includes thinly veiled references to Lollapalooza, Spike Jonze, and Drew Barrymore.

Ein Hett The Lightning and the Sun [album]

Seattle's perennially forgotten but not-quite-gone Silverwave revisit their Montana heritage by regrouping as '90s doom-and-gloom heroes.

Pimples as fashion accessory [hip visual trend]

See Harmony Korine, Spikeiven-wearing downtown types, and Japanese fab-mag *Big*. Extra double hip.

Gavedweller [novel]

In Dorothy Allison's latest, the protagonist is an alcoholic former rocker. Admirable but somehow quite dull.

Exposed thong underwear [fashion trend]

Just in time for spring, the white trash look goes below the belt. Our advice: Pull up your pants, please.

www.wwwnonline.com [Web site]

The Weekly World News online. Headlines from a recent visit: "Iraq's Saddam Hussein WITH HIS GAY LOVER!" "Photos prove Elvis has his death!" and "Flying pigs, the last of the dinosaurs, a 22-lb. grasshopper, a half-junior/half-alligator... Only in our Biizarre Images Gallery!"

Saabs and Diggweed at Twilio [party]

It's a Twilio, a house DJ move: the crowd at this monthly gathering of urban tribes in New York City. Number techno, hip-hop, rock, just a sweet-sounding soundtrack for 4 A.M. epiphanies.

Tomb Raider Pt. 2

Sister's a nico, 'em-up babe returns as a Body Gloved, seething mercenary. Her IQ may be high, but her body counts are higher.

Violence against cats [trend]

This makes us totally upset. Really.

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INCONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Reuseless

The recycling logo as art and commerce

As environmentalism is now just another selling point for marketers to dangle in front of our noses, the triple-arrowed recycling logo has become one of the most ubiquitous graphic symbols on the consumer landscape. But while most people pay at least lip service to environmental awareness, their good intentions don't always match their purchasing choices. As marketing consultant Robert McMeth explains in his new book, *What Were They Thinking*,

"Consumers invariably tell pollsters that they'll willingly pay a little more for a product that's friendly to the environment. When they get to the cash register, however, it's usually a different story."

And maybe that's just as well, because the recycling logo, despite its official-looking imprimatur, is legally toothless and has a surprisingly sketchy history. Designed in 1970 by a now-obscure graphics student named Gery Anderson, the logo was never trademarked and isn't subject to any proprietary or regulatory controls. As an element of the public domain, it can be appropriated and applied to literally any product by literally anybody, regardless of legitimately recycled content or recyclability. In fact, many products displaying the symbol don't even bother to make specific claims along these lines—they simply use the logo to encourage recycling, which is about as courageous as being opposed to child abuse.

But while the logo's legal value may be nil, its success on other levels—particularly its market saturation—is undeniable. As a result, the many variations on the symbol used by companies, industries, and foreign countries are all instantly recognizable as recycling logos, even though, as the following gallery demonstrates, some of them bear only a passing resemblance to Anderson's original design.

Paul Lukas

Readers, manufacturers, and publicists are encouraged to send products, gadgets, promotional literature, and suggestions to Paul Lukas, Spin, 6 W. 18th St., New York, NY 10011. E-mail: consumer@interport.net

**The Original Model, United States**

Anderson's design was submitted as an entry in a design competition sponsored by the Container Corporation of America. The contest coincided with 1970, the first year Earth Day was celebrated.

**Coca-Cola Classic, United States**

The ultimate example of a company transforming the recycling symbol into just another brand in its product line. Similar branded versions of the logo appear on the packages of Coke-owned beverages such as Sprite and Surge, as if the Coca-Cola Company itself had come up with the idea of recycling and lovingly bestowed it upon a grateful planet.

**9 Lives Plus Super Supper Cat Food, United States**

Similar to the Coke logo, except this time an entire industry, rather than a single company, is riding along on the goodwill generated by the symbol. The arrow points have been patterned after the stars in the U.S. Steel icon, although more people now think of it as the Pittsburgh Steelers logo, which makes the Livin Plus Super Supper Cat Food League may be getting more of a p.r. boost from the symbol than the steel industry.

**Hires Root Beer, United States**

Another industry-specific logo, although here the link to Anderson's symbol is less direct, characterized only by the use of a folding arrow. Unlike the two knock-offs to the left, both of which nag the consumer to please recycle, this one simply notes that glass is recyclable and, in an inspiring display of faith, trusts the consumer to take it from there.

**Pocari Sweat Refreshment Water, Japan**

This triangular symbol appears on a variety of Japanese canned goods. In what appears to be a major design gaffe, the lettering (which translates to "aluminum") breaks the flow of the arrows, so this logo seems to have a beginning and an end instead of evoking an endless cycle of reuse—an unwelcome consequence, perhaps, on the consumer of putatively recyclable goods that nonetheless end up in a landfill.

**Coca-Cola light, Japan**

Another Japanese logo, and a much better one. The type (which translates to "steel") merges with the arrows instead of interrupting them. Even better, the symbol is a regular pentagon, rather than a triangular one, evokes a sense of the earth in a way that trumps the other symbols shown here. Why didn't Anderson think of that?

**Yeo's Grass Jelly Drink, Singapore**

Anderson's use of three arrows wasn't arbitrary—they stand for recycle, reduce, and reuse. So what does the fourth arrow represent in this mark? Maybe it's for redundant.

**Meica Deutschländer Frankenfutter, Germany**

A more literal variation on the yin-yang dynamic. Interestingly, the arrows in this design don't turn back on each other like those in the other logos, which seems to defeat the whole point. This, in turn, leads us to...

**Lucky Goldstar Herbal Bamboo and Salt Toothpaste, South Korea**

A more literal variation on the yin-yang dynamic. Interestingly, the arrows in this design don't turn back on each other like those in the other logos, which seems to defeat the whole point. This, in turn, leads us to...

**Pine Bud Drink, South Korea**

The arrows in this symbol appear to be gathering steam as they bypass each other. Or, in the words of Dennis Johnson, editor of *Graphic Design USA*, who first brought this logo to his attention, "The arrows almost seem to be saying, 'If you toss this can aside, it will land somewhere nearby.'" Given how meaningless the recycling logo often turns out to be, Johnson's interpretation probably makes this symbol the most honest one of the lot.



ABSOLUT RESTRAINT.

GENEALOGY

Tie-In

The secret history of the skinny tie

Eighties nostalgia may be on the wane, but that hasn't stopped retro-minded designers from bringing back yet another sartorial signpost from the Reagan/Thatcher era. Skinny ties are now being remade and remodeled by such tony lines as Prada and Gucci, bringing with them an air of late-new-wave sangfroid. Razor-thin neckwear isn't the sole property of pop foyers, however. As the chart below shows, skinny ties used to be an emblem of hipster rebellion, back when rebellion was hip.

Michael J. Agovino

Circa 1910 Not a true skinny tie, but these narrow cravats are a definite departure from the fluffy ascots and soft bows that came before. A precursor to modern-day cool, they usher in a century of men wearing nooses around their necks.

Who wore them: absinthe-drinking Edwardians

Late '50s Like the hip-hoppers who would later embrace Tommy Hilfiger gear, young, disenfranchised men in Harlem appropriate the narrow ties favored by Ivy Leaguers and make them their own. These super-skinny ties, usually worn with tight-fitting suits and flamboyant shirts, are eventually picked up by jazzmen and the Beats who worship them.

Who wore them: bouncers at the Apollo, pre-hippie Allen Ginsberg

Mid '60s Looking to snub the white establishment and create a uniform of their own, the ska-and-rock steady-loving rude boys of Jamaica and England borrow the skinny tie from U.S. jazzmen. Then Bob Marley changes everything.

Who wore them: angry young men in Trench Town and Brixton

Late '70s/Early '80s Skinny ties resurface, probably first in England, with the unlikely confluence of new wavers, punks, and Rastafarians. As with punks' ripped-up T-shirts, the tie loses all credibility as soon as it gets co-opted by strip-mall America a few years later.

Who wore them: one-hit wonders, jerks you went to high school with

1998 With the market on the rise and ska on the charts, the skinny tie returns, minus the sociopolitical baggage.

Who wears them: coked-up currency traders, the Mighty Mighty Bosstones

NEW PRODUCT FACE-OFF

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True, the slow erosion of institutions like religion, marriage, and the Boy Scouts has left many of us confused, directionless, and in dire need of guidance. Who can decide which brand of jeans, which tattoo, which spiritual path is the right

one to pledge allegiance to? In grappling for answers to these eternal questions, there is one consolation to consider: We have more tools than ever to tell us where we are and show us where we're going.

G. Beato



Carin 520

Description: Dashboard-mounted global positioning system that provides "automatic route-planning and guidance."

Contact info: Philips
(800) 535-3500

Price: \$2,399, including installation

Dimensions: 162 mm x 104 mm x 52 mm

Possible Purpose: Makes driving easier. "At every crossroad or sharp turn, Carin offers you both visual and acoustic guidance."

Unique selling proposition: Backseat driving instructions now come from an authoritative robot voice instead of nagging passenger. Carin 520 also provides information on local points of interest.

Options: External loudspeaker

User friendliness: Moderate. "When your car is parked for a long period of time, it takes a few minutes before the car navigation system can pick up enough satellites and evaluate their signals."

Advantage: The Observer. Sometimes it's best to forsake careful planning and just dive right in.

The Observer

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None

Extremely high

PARANOIA MARKETING ALERT

Fear and Lathering

The latest marketing wisdom is that fear, like sex, sells. Consider Purell, an "Instant Hand Sanitizer." The hair gel-like goo has been flying off the shelves since it was introduced last year, no doubt thanks to its dread-inducing message that germs are spreading, and no one is safe. A voice-over in a recent TV spot warns that germs "can make you pretty sick...and [they] live on all kinds of things." As the camera pans out from a microscopic view of slimy bacteria, we see the little bastards have camped out on the keypad of an otherwise harmless-looking ATM.

Purell, which boasts it can kill 99.9 percent of germs in 15 seconds, has been a hit with the growing number of germophobes, as well as flesh-pressing politicians (according to a press release, both Gore and Clinton use it, perhaps even with interns). But its true target market is females. Women are more susceptible to "antibiotic-resistant microorganisms," says a company spokeswoman, because they spend more time shopping, cleaning, and wiping babies' bottoms. Paranoia, though, has no age bias. Purell just introduced a new kids' line, so now Junior can protect himself from Mom's dirty pews.

Shoshana Berger



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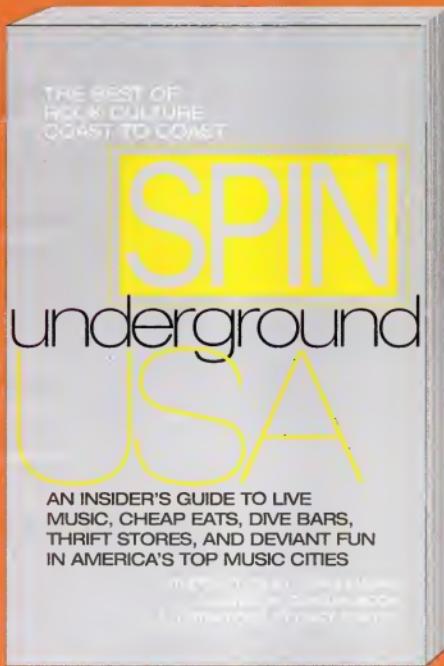
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Q: Where can I find a poetry slam in **PORTLAND**?

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Fat, Cheap, and Out of Control

Belushi, Candy, Farley: Why TV's tubby guys always seem to bust a gut

WHERE DID WE GET THE IDEA FAT MEN ARE jolly? In party photos, Chris Farley's mouth gaped in a rictus meant as wildman glee—but instantly recognizable as a scream. Like his role model John Belushi, Farley died from a speedball at 33. The 5'9" Belushi weighed out at 220 pounds; the 5'9" Farley at 290. Both actors tunneled free of their padded rooms via an escape route of party girls, powdered drugs, and meals that would make a cardiologist weep.

Farley also admired John Candy, another portly funnyman who died too young—in his case at 43 of a heart attack hastened by his 330 pounds. Where Farley was obsessive-compulsive, Candy suffered severe panic attacks. "Eating, ingesting, smoking," a friend told *People* after Candy died, "for John, it was a way of swallowing that anxiety." (The first time I met Candy, at a party, he was sucking a big hit of nitrous oxide; the next time, he was standing by the kitchen at the Hard Rock Cafe, holding court behind two heaping plates of french fries. "Have some fries!" he said. "Oh, come on—don't make me eat 'em all!")

As if their private anxieties weren't enough, all three men barreled full tilt into the twin barricades of entertainment apartheid. The first barricade restricts roles available to heavyweight sketch comics; the second restricts roles available to sketch comics, period. Comic actors who trade on their girth to get laughs (unlike, say, John Goodman or Jackie Gleason) court infantilization. They come to seem big greedily-mouthed babies. On *Saturday Night Live*, Belushi did a great Elizabeth Taylor in her chunky phase, gobbling a chicken thigh so voraciously he had to give himself the Heimlich maneuver. In *Black Sheep*, Farley eats a huge plate of wings and smokes an enormous blunt. In *Splash*, Candy plays racquetball briefly while puffing on a cigarette, then collapses, wheezing "Oh, God," as he crawls toward his cooler. "My heart is beating like a rabbit. You want a beer?"

Stuck in the oral phase, as Freud would have it, their sexuality is chaste or glancing. Candy mud-wrestles five women in *Stripes*; Belushi spurns Carrie Fisher in *The Blues Brothers* in favor of helping out

a sadistic nun; in each of his movies Farley seeks not a lover but a brother. When *Playboy* asked Candy to "reveal a big man's sex secrets," he replied, "Patience." Similarly, when an *Us* reporter asked Farley what he sought in a woman, he answered, "Willfulness." "I can imagine [romantic love]," he added, "and longing for it makes me sad."

Candy, the best actor of the three, showcased his size in his *SCTV* impersonations. He was Orson Welles stalking off Liberace's Christmas show in a huff (but snatching a roast chicken on the way); Godzilla being asked, "What bothers you most?" on a Japanese interview show and answering, "Well, I guess... power lines. Power lines really tick me off!" (turning to the audience for sympathy); and Julia Child being pummeled around the boxing ring by Mr. Rogers ("The French Chef is visibly shaken").

Candy's two-note snicker ("Heh-heh") could express anything from self-satisfaction to blustery wounded innocence to—if he retracted his lips a touch—abject fawning. It made him a brilliant supporting player in such films as *Stripes* and *Splash*. But he couldn't carry a movie: *See—* or rather don't see—*Brewster's Millions* and *The Great Outdoors*. It's just that they are poorly written. It's also that we require sexuality and slim physical ease from a leading man (or woman: Roseanne and Rosie O'Donnell don't get any kiss-face parts either).

Roly-poly guys are childlike ids, and there is a pleasing balance when they are paired with thin, finicky superegos: David Spade, Dan Aykroyd, Steve Martin. The joyless adults seek to tease and shame the chubby kids into line. Thus Moe and Curly; Abbott and Costello; Carson and McMahon; O'Brien and Richter. If the Marx Brothers weren't all such violent ids, they'd have required another, tubby brother to disapprove of—Blimpio, perhaps.

Of the three, Belushi was the least round, the most sexual. In *National Lampoon's Animal House*, the movie that inspired Farley's whole career, Belushi's Bluto was a drunken slob. But he was a drunken slob in the sybaritic manner of ancient Rome. The seven-year student with the 00 grade-point average had

burly dexterity, sneaky eyebrows, and the trick of cocking an ear as if taking angelic dictation before, say, squashing a beer can on his forehead. When Bluto drove off with the sorority queen into their future as "Senator and Mrs. John Blutarsky," he exuded lordly contentment.

Farley's affect actually lay much closer to *Animal House*'s Flounder. Flounder, played by Stephen Furst, is awkward, needy, the butt of the joke. As Faber College's dean tells him, "Fat, drunk, and stupid is no way to go through life, son." So too, Farley, who suggested that his comic persona, like most, began as a defense: "I made them laugh before they could call me fatso." But they still called him fatso—in *Tommy Boy*, 19 jokes are made about Farley's weight. In fact, Farley's persona was exactly what he was supposedly making people laugh in order to forget: the desperate younger brother, the hyper doofus who keeps getting stuck, flop-sweating, farting, and apologizing for a body helplessly at war with the world. A pediatrician would prescribe Ritalin. A self-medicator would try anything that might lend the illusion of suavity.

Before turning to serious drugs, Farley took to forge a manly identity by retracing all of Belushi's comic signatures. Doing improv with Chicago's Second City troupe, Farley wore boots Belushi had also worn at Second City; backstage at *Saturday Night Live* he kept one eyebrow taped up as a Belushi homage; and when his *SNL* character Matt Foley took a pratfall, it was after the manner of Belushi, who ended many *SNL* sketches with a wild topple.

In Farley's best film, *Tommy Boy*, his fat-boy character and his exploitation, "You know, a lot of people go to college for seven years!" are pure Beluto. His cartwheels repeat Belushi's cartwheels as Jake Blues. Meanwhile, *Tommy Boy*'s odd-couple-on-the-road idea, in which Farley and David Spade trash the car to its chassis and sing along to the Carpenters' "Superstar," is a complete steal from John Candy and Steve Martin in *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, who also trash the car to its chassis after Candy sings along to Ray Charles's "Mess Around."

In books this is called plagiarism. In TV and movie

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comedy, slavish imitation is so routine it's called commercial formula. Only it's not very commercial: Farley's movies grew less and less profitable as, like photocopies of photocopies, they grew less and less distinct. *Beverly Hills Ninja* had even lamer physical comedy than *Black Sheep*, which was a desperate imitation of *Tommy Boy*, which was prompted by Farley's better work on *SNL*, which was inspired by Belushi and Candy.

In truth Farley, Belushi, and Candy did their best work early in sketch comedy. Their films were mostly reheated riffs pieced out with Hamburger Helper. Fat sketch actors are like child stars: At a certain point no one wants to see Macaulay Culkin anymore. And with rare exceptions—Bill Murray, Eddie Murphy, Mike Myers—that holds for sketch actors in general. Those who failed to parlay *SNL* and *SCTV* moments into a big movie career include Martin Short, Dana Carvey, Jon Lovitz, Phil Hartman, and Joe Piscopo, among many others. They were too identified with tired characters such as Church Lady and the Master Thespian.

The godfather of this syndrome is *SNL* guru Lorne Michaels. Michaels repeats sketches until the last grin has faded, whereupon he expands them into duod movies like *The Coneheads* and *Stuart Saves His Family* and it's *Pat*, killing off the comic memo for good. It's the entertainment corollary to the Peter Principle—call it the Michaels Principle.

Belushi wanted out of all this: At the end, talking acting with Robert De Niro, Belushi got encouragement for a Method scenario in which he'd shoot up on-screen as a p.r. exec entangled in the punk scene. It would be raw and real. But Belushi's manager and the studio were pushing him toward *The Joy of Sex*, the comic premise being that Belushi would wear a diaper. A chubby guy in a diaper! That's rich.

Farley also felt trapped. His best routines tapped a sweetness unconnected to his heft; they were weightless both in that sense and in being airy, pixelated. On *SNL*'s "The Chris Farley Show" he'd get in way over his head ("Remember when you were in the Beatles?" he asked a nonplussed Paul McCartney. "That was cool.") Even better were his swoony rants. In *Tommy Boy* he picks up a dinner roll to explain why he gets over-excited as a salesmen and can't close the deal: "The pet is my possible sale. Oh, my pretty little pet," he says dreamily, running his fingers over it like a girl with her first Barbie. "So I stroked it, and I pet it, and I massage it"—now he's rubbing his nose against the roll—"and I love my naughty little pet! You're naughty!"

Farley yearned to play a serious role, and had in mind Bill Murray in *The Razor's Edge*. But that was Bill Murray's last purely dramatic role—for the same reason no one much wanted to see John Candy being serious in *JFK*. Farley knew he'd probably blown any shot at drama: "If [people] don't accept it, that's okay," he told a reporter. "I signed on as a clown, and by golly, I'll keep my end of the bargain if that's what people want."

It's certainly what Farley's handlers wanted. The point of an eerily honest (and unfunny) skit kicking off the October *SNL*, Farley hosted in his last public appearance was that everyone required more Farley product, more of the proven boffo. "Farley falls down," as Tim Meadows told Lorne Michaels, "ratings go up."

For a while, anyway. Like Belushi and Candy, Farley went out just past the crest of his commercial appeal. He knew his movies were crap and that, over time, audiences respond to the Michaels Principle by tuning out: More is less. Yet Farley was famous as the funny fat guy, and he worried that if he lost weight no one would love him anymore. And worried, too, that that love was mixed with contempt. But he kept his end of the bargain: he never stopped eating and falling down. •



Is this the face of a legend?
Sandra Bullock, ordinary person.

Is Sandra Bullock Good for You?

Probably not, but then again she might be better for you than the usual wonders of physical and psychic perfection who pass for film stars

WATCHED *Red Dust* THE OTHER NIGHT on TV. Made in 1932, five years after the advent of sound, *Red Dust* might be said to have inaugurated the age of the modern superstar. As Gloria Swanson reminded us in *Sunset Boulevard*, the movie stars of the silent era "had faces then," which was another way of saying they were more dreamlike for having no sound but the gleam of divine light.

In *Red Dust*, the part of a rubber-plantation boss was originally to be played by John Gilbert. But Gilbert had a very lifelike voice that never lived up to his dreamlike face, and in his place was cast Clark Gable. Gable had seemed finished in pictures not so long before; already in his 30s, he was an unpromising bit actor with little more than the cocky self-assurance of a guy who would later kill someone in an auto accident and let a studio party take the fall. For the Hollywood bosses who got off the hook, Gable made a movie he hated called *It Happened One Night* in which a bunch of drunks, escorting him to a bus, called out, "Make way for the king!" They were kidding; the world wasn't. Two decades before Elvis, Gable became the only king anyone cared about.

Directors define film as art, but stars define movies as culture. In our relationship with our movie stars, the times can be read like tea leaves: Do we need our stars to be the size of our dreams, or the size of our lives? In the late '90s there's a great lurking anarchy about the movies, as big stu-

dio pictures pile up the numbers while little independent films steal our hearts; assuming they're given to such ruminations, the studio execs must rack their brains trying to figure out how it is that both Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks can currently be our most enduring stars. Even the great yin-yangs of Gable/Grant in the '30s and Bogart/Wayne in the '40s shared a certain swaggering self-humor in the first case and a surly don't-give-a-shit snarl in the second. Tom/Tom share nothing but a name, one of them the size of our dreams, glamorous and flawless, the other the size of our lives, familiar and slightly botched. As a hard drinking, hot-tempered bully in *Red Dust*, all sexual greed and self-leaching and secret grace, Gable managed to be both.

Over the last 20 years, our stars have tended to be entirely dream figures, albeit of a bigger and noisier dream—either unstoppable machines (Schwarzenegger, Stallone) or brilliant monsters (De Niro, Pacino, Nicholson), in movies where humanity was either an ergogenous zone or an open wound (or both). We may now need stars the size of our lives in order to feel like we have our humanity back. John Travolta's recent comeback—two indisputably bloated decades after *Saturday Night Fever*—wouldn't have been possible in the '80s, even as in *as striking a movie as Pulp Fiction*. It wouldn't have been possible for him to seem cool again, and cool not in spite of his new middle-aged bulk but because of it. Acclaimed as a '90s incarnation of James Stewart, Tom Hanks is revered exactly to the degree he's so unremarkable—



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ALPINE

BODY BY LAMBORGHINI. MOBILE MULTIMEDIA BY ALPINE.



unhandsome, only passably charismatic, with a journeyman's talent. It's this very "normality" that made palatable his two most acclaimed and popular (and non-normal) roles: a gay man dying of AIDS in *Philadelphia* and an all-American turbocharged idiot savant in *Forrest Gump*.

Ten years ago, Sandra Bullock wouldn't have tumbled out of a bus to become, even for just 18 months,

Last year, the only movie people really loved wasn't about a sinking ocean liner or rebellious slaves or L.A. detectives in the 1950s

the biggest star in Hollywood. As it happens, I briefly met Bullock one night in 1994, two weeks before the release of *Speed*; my wife and I were having dinner at a banquet where "Sandy," as she introduced herself, sat at our table. Over the course of the next few hours, all of us except Bullock proceeded to drink ourselves into an extravagantly obnoxiousness, insulting other tables and inhaling the helium out of party balloons in order to squeak rude things at the stuffy speakers until, finally, someone had to come over and admonish us. The next day, still suffering from my hangover, I ran into Bullock at a hardware store where she helpfully showed me where to get lumber cut while abashedly lamenting our behavior of the previous evening, for which she seemed to take full responsibility even though she alone had been a model of decorum.

It's still hard to know whether Bullock is a good actress. She really hasn't had much opportunity to prove the matter one way or the other. There's the sense that her new picture, *Hope Floats*, which she not only stars in but produced, is a do-or-die picture for her, one box-office bomb away from exhausting her phenomenon altogether. But in *Hope Floats*, as in *While You Were Sleeping*, and even *Speed*, she plays to her strength, as an ordinary woman triumphing over her travails, with the psychic distance between the persona on the screen and the woman I met exactly zero—which is why audiences connected with her in the first place. They sensed she was authentic and bright and unlikely to embarrass herself at dinner parties. Whether in an action flick like the one that made her famous—in which she lent the film its only humanity—or in the new drama as a woman returning home

to her mother from a shattered marriage, Bullock hasn't been the size of our dreams but the size of our lives. She is the movies' most attractive incarnation of ordinariness—a civilian slumming as a star.

Last year the only movie that people seemed to love, the only film you actually heard people talk about with any kind of joy, wasn't about sinking ocean liners or rebellious slaves or cops in L.A. in the '50s. It was about

six middle-aged men in a dying English steel town whose only shot at even a single night of glory was to take off their clothes before the cooly appraising gaze of the city's women. Leaving the theater, you knew, of course, that once their moment of glory passed, the lives of these men would go back to what they were before: in real life, glory is fleeting. The movies, on the other hand, are built on glory. And whether it's with an unassuming little film like *The Full Monty* or an accumulation of films such as *Ulee's Gold* or *Eve's Bayou* or *Good Will Hunting*, you get the feeling that what the audience wants from its movie stars these days is a glory it can believe in, even if the audience is still figuring out what exactly that means. ■

Short Subjects

Klaus Kinski: Alternate Oscars

No one ever accused Polish-born actor Klaus Kinski of being Everyman. If the id has a face, it is Kinski's: unearthingly beautiful in his youth, increasingly demonic as it was ravaged by some very strange times. Occasionally, before his death in 1991, Kinski delivered extraordinary performances in pictures like the 1979 remake of *Nosferatu*, the *Vampire* and the amazing *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972). But more than that, as is clear in his memoir *Kinski Uncut* (Penquin), Kinski was the international-film-star-as-punk-rocker, most accomplished in the art of outrageous living, constantly ranting at a world he considered too stupid for his likes, cutting a sexual swath through all the women within his proximity—or maybe just the most posturorous of lars in an age full of them.... For all the attitude critics like to cop about the Academy Awards, the handful of movies named Best Picture that actually deserved it—*Casablanca*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Unforgiven*, the first

ROUGH CUTS

Hey, Kids! Iran!

If it's Friday night and there's nothing on TV, how 'bout let's check out some Iranian cinema?

West of Teheran, Iranian cinema means Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami, whose recent films offer a kind of yin/yang. Makhmalbaf's *Gohbeh* exhibits shades of turquoise, puce, lime yellow, and iridescent pink I've never seen before. Kiarostami's *The Taste of Cherry* is the reddish-brown of a hill of dirt. Makhmalbaf's locations—a snow-covered desert, a freestanding cliff—are breathtaking in a discount David Lean way. Kiarostami's location is a hill of dirt. Gohbeh tells the mythic tale of a young girl whose father keeps putting off her wedding; whose family, a band of a dozen or so nomads—all immediately dressed in the supersaturated aforementioned colors—heads and shears sheep and makes carpets ("gabbeh") out of the wool; carpets whose designs tell the mythic tale of a young girl whose father keeps putting off...blah, blah, blah. *The Taste of Cherry* traces the perhaps last day in the life of a middle-aged man who drives a compact station wagon (which must get great mpg since it doesn't need to stop refueling) around said hill of dirt.

The Makhmalbaf, quaint, charming,

is a good bet for the foreign film Oscar. Kiarostami's dirt movie, by far the better of the two, won Cannes.

It's not that *The Taste of Cherry* lacks quaint. Few contemporary movies are as generous in providing helpful hints on everyday needs: mending ladders, wedging cars out of ditches, moving dirt from one hill to the next. This last seems to be a major concern in the film. The lead (a non-actor who looks like Bruno Ganz) motors around the hillside, soliciting young men—a construction worker, a soldier, a seminarian. Job description: Dump 20 spades of dirt on a corpse the next morning. The Ganz look-alike plans a barbiturate OD.

Yeah, it's metaphorical. And it's slow, static, muted. The rhythm of Kiarostami's editing will either mesmerize or put to sleep. The formal repetition of shots and scenes produces a system within which any slight variation can seem a revelation. If you thought *Titanic's* love story was moving, there's always *Great Expectations*. If you have the Zen to sit through the first 90 minutes of *The Taste of Cherry*, the last five may be Nirvana.

The Taste of Cherry opens March 20.

Bob Davis



Kinski: No punk like an old punk.

nie Driver, *Grosse Pointe Blank*. Actor: Robert Duvall, *The Apostle*. Supporting Actress: Julianne Moore, *Boogie Nights*. Supporting Actor: Robert Forster, *Jackie Brown*. Original Screenplay: *The Full Monty*. Adapted Screenplay: *Donnie Brasco*. Cinematography: *Lost Highway*. Art Direction: *Titanic*. Costume Design: *The Fifth Element*. Editing: *L.A. Confidential*. Special Effects: *Titanic*. Sound: *Titanic*. Dramatic Score: *Kundun*. Song: Trent Reznor, "The Perfect Drug," from *Lost Highway*. Foreign Language Film: *Shall We Dance*. S.E.

LIFE'S A BITCH
AND THEN YOU
BUY A MINIVAN.

G-SHOCK
TIME MACHINES
Make every second count.

ASSEMBLY LINE: BEHIND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY MACHINE

Just Gimme Indie Funk!

The Artist Formerly Known as Prince finds that bucking the system is harder than it looks

It's easy for musicians to work outside the system when the system doesn't even know they exist. When she was just starting out, folk iconoclast Ani DiFranco had no choice but to book her own tours and sell her CDs by mail. It's much harder for established superstars to buck the industry, as Pearl Jam discovered when they took on Tick-ettmaster, hurting themselves more than they helped sur-

charge-wearied concertgoers. Inspired by Ani DiFranco's example, the Artist Formerly Known as Prince is taking even more radical risks after a decade of plugging popularity. Having shed himself of his manager, booking agent, and record label, the Artist, who once declared himself a major-label "slave," began plotting his own tours and marketing his CDs through the Internet. But, as the Artist was soon to find, going indie ain't easy.

His guerrilla tours were certainly a surprise smash. *Pollstar*, the concert industry trade journal, estimates that the Artist grossed \$24.6 million on 73 shows last

year, masking him 1997's eighth most potent concert draw—ahead of Aerosmith, Bush, even Lilith Fair. On one level, this isn't so surprising. Like his hero George Clinton, the Artist has a reputation as a phenomenal live performer. What makes his touring success so impressive is that he and his personal assistant, Willie Donwell, now book his concerts on the fly, scheduling arena shows a week or two in advance instead of three or six months ahead—the industry standard—and relying mostly on word-of-mouth rather than on paid advertising.

"That's probably hurt ticket sales," says *Pollstar* Editor-in-Chief Gary Boniovanni, noting that few of the Artist's '97 shows sold out and some were less than half-full.

"But I really don't believe it's in his best interest to operate this way, though obviously he's able to keep all the money he does make. There are reasons agents and promoters exist."

But according to Donwell, the profit margin on the Artist's '97 tour was in the 65 to 70 percent range, compared to 35 to 40 percent for performers who must pay their agents, managers, and local promoters. (In most cities, the Artist assumes the promoter role as well, eliminating yet another middleman.) Which means that the Artist made much more money on his own than he could have from an agency-booked tour—even one that sold out every night.

The Artist's attempt to become an Internet entrepreneur has bombed by comparison. Last summer, he launched a Web site, love4oneanother.com (reportedly supervised by

his wife, Mayte), and a toll-free number (1-800-NEW FUNK) to handle orders for a new three-CD set, *Crystal Ball*. At the time it was first announced, fans were informed that the elaborate globe-shaped package wouldn't be pressed until 100,000 orders had been logged, with the first round of customers promised a special bonus CD. Months of contradictory updates followed.

Last September, fans were informed that pressing was about to begin for the first 84,000 *Crystal Ball* orders. In early December, the site hinted that Christmas delivery was a distinct possibility. At the end of the month, however, love4oneanother.com dropped a new bomb: A retail chain was interested in distributing the album at its stores. "Shipping will b gin [sic]," the site promised, "when the final details r worked out with this distributor. The Artist wants it available everywhere when the mailing starts." As of late January, no *Crystal Ball* packages had been shipped to Web customers. But Best Buy, a 285-store consumer electronics chain operating in 32 states, announced a distribution deal for a four-CD set including *Crystal Ball* and a new album, *The Truth*. At press time, the chain hoped to have the set in stores by early March, but it was still unclear when mail-order fans could expect their shipments. Why was the Artist giving up the indie hard line after just a few months?

"Pearl Jam ridas again," suggests Russ Solomon, chairman of Tower Records, when asked what he thinks of the Artist's attempt to operate outside traditional retail channels. "The Internet is a hard way to do business." He doesn't think a distribution deal with a single retailer makes sense either. "We wouldn't strike one, and I would resent it if another chain struck one. It would be stupid for the Artist as well."

Nor does the Artist's chief indie inspiration, Ani DiFranco, do business this way. Instead, DiFranco's albums can be found in virtually all 20,000 music retail outlets nationwide, thanks to Koch International, the independently-owned distributor used by DiFranco's self-owned label, Righteous Babe. Still, DiFranco's manager Scot Fisher is impressed by the Artist's renegade ways. "As other artists realize they can have control over their art and make a living, things will change," he says. "You have to pay for your freedom. It's expensive, but it's worth it." —Keith Moerer

OBITUARIES

Some fans claim that rockabilly pioneer Carl Perkins, who died in January at 65, was just a car crash away from being as big as Elvis. With Perkins's 1956 hit "Blue Suede Shoes" rising on the charts, he suffered a broken neck on the way to make his television debut in New York City. While Perkins recovered, his former Sun Records labelmate Elvis Presley recorded a cover version of "Blue Suede Shoes," which forever eclipsed Perkins's original. But Perkins's black-influenced

singing and guitar-picking style was a primary influence on both Johnny Cash and the Beatles.... Mississippi gutbucket guitarist David "Junior" Kimbrough, whose earthy "cottonpatch blues" was featured in the documentary *Deep Blues*, died in January at 67. His final album, *Most Things Haven't Worked Out*, was released by Fat Possum Records last year.

Gaylord Fields

In the Studio



Chuck D

→ Political rap godfathers Public Enemy are back in business just three years after a London farewell concert at which Chuck D announced he was disillusioned with hip-hop. Claiming that innovative acts like Prodigy and DJ Shadow have rekindled his faith in the music, he summoned the original PE crew—Flavor Flav, Terminator X, Professor Griff, and the Bomb Squad production team—to record two new albums. First up is the soundtrack to the upcoming Spike Lee film *He Got Game*, then the full-length studio project *There's a Poison Going On*, scheduled for a late spring release. Though the band has been out of the loops for a few years, Chuck D says not to expect any Puff-ed up tracks. "We don't give a fuck about making the charts," he says.

→ According to Laуryn Hill of the Fugees, "When you're a young woman in the music industry, people want you to be a diva, a diva, and sing those songs... and that's never been me." True to her words, Hill is putting the final touches on a solo album that she wrote and produced herself. "No one can tell my story but me," she says of the "very personal" music that was inspired by the birth of her son. With the Fugees on hiatus, Hill has also directed videos for soul diva Aretha Franklin and the Chicago rapper Common. "I don't always want to be the person in front," says Hill. "I like all facets of creating." —Julia Chaplin



Laуryn Hill



Carl Perkins

BEVERLY HILLS  POLO CLUB

MICHAEL RAPAPORT, ACTOR





PACIFICO CLARA

MAZATLÁN MÉXICO



Lose your illusion:
Avi Rose, left, and
Slash

Appetite for Procrastination

Will there ever be another Guns N' Roses album?—it's been nearly five years since the mega-Platinum glam-metal-heads released *The Spaghetti Incident?* punk homage. A source says that singer Avi Rose has amassed more than 1,000 rehearsal tapes, and holes up in his studio every night obsessively trying to whip the songs into shape.

"It's entirely possible that Guns N' Roses will deliver an album by the end of the year," ventured Geffen Records representative Bryn Bridenthal. "But I've been saying that for the past three years."

According to Rose's manager, Doug Goldstein, one of the main reasons for the album's delay is the musical rift between Rose and former lead guitarist Slash, who quit GNR last year. Goldstein says that Rose is now into techno acts like Nine Inch Nails and Prodigy and wants to update the band's sound, while Slash wanted to stick to their metal roots. "Avi is concerned about being relevant," Goldstein says.

"Avi is really worried about what's gone on musically in the '90s," agrees former drummer Matt Sorum, who also left the group last year, along with bassist Duff McKagan and long-time producer Mike Clink. "Most of *Use Your Illusion I & II* was written while we were on tour. But then when it came time for this record, he had too much time on his hands and started overanalyzing everything and studying bands he heard on the radio and saw on MTV. Truth is, if kids want to buy a techno

record, they're not going to buy Guns N' Roses."

But according to techne-auteur Moby, who recently spent time with Rose in his Los Angeles studio, "Avi had finished several songs that sounded like rock music with sampling technology and were really good." Goldstein claims that finishing the record is now really just a matter of putting a good team together. The current GNR lineups features guitarist Robin Finck (ex-Nine Inch Nails), keyboardist Dizzy Reed, and guitarist Paul Hug. Rose has been auditioning other musicians, including ex-Pearl Jam drummer Dave Abbruzzese and ex-NIN drummer Chris Vrenna. As for producers, Rose has met with nearly every heavyweight in the business, including Scott Litt (R.E.M.), Steve Lillywhite (U2), Flood (PJ Harvey, U2), Moby, and Rick Rubin—but has yet to make a final hit.

Meanwhile, Geffen—a label in sore need of a hit—has pumped an enormous amount of money into the project. A source close to the band estimates that the price tag has climbed well over \$1 million, but calls it a "small investment" considering that GNR have sold more than 62 million records worldwide. The ever-changing release date "has become a running joke at the label," says a Geffen source.

"Avi isn't going to force an album because of commercial pressures," counters GNR manager Goldstein. "He'll keep trying different people and things, and when it's right—however long it takes—he'll be ready to put out a record." J.C.

HUSH HUSH The monthly dish on the music biz

Looks like trouble in the material world. Insiders are reporting a critical situation inside Madonna's Maverick Records due to friction between the Material Girl's two primary label partners, former longtime manager Freddy DeMann and 24-year-old A&R wunderkind Guy Oseary. DeMann

put Guy O. in business when he indulged the then-17-year-old entrepreneur and family friend by providing him office space at the fledgling label. Soon thereafter, Guy O. took Maverick from suspect vanity label to major industry player by striking multi-Platinum with *Backstage Pass*, *Candlebox*, and soon thereafter achieved weasel immortality by inking next-gen hit machine Alanis Morissette and rocktronica N.O.W.-baiters Prodigy. Concurrently, Guy O. has become the industry media darling and glamour boy (Puffy aside), often sighted trotting the globe as part of the new Brat Pack alongside actors Stephen Dorff, Elizabeth Berkley, and Ben Stiller; Chili Pepper Anthony Kiedis; and the de rigueur complement of supermodels. As for his rift with DeMann, some sources say Guy O.'s nosebleed ascent led to the split

between the boy genius and his former mentor, while others point to Oseary's role as main Maddy confidante and his godfathering of her recent decision to sign with Q-Prime Management (home to Courtney Love, Smashing Pumpkins, and Metallica). With Maverick's joint-venture deal with the Warner Music Group expiring in mid-1999, onlookers wonder just how the hugely successful but troubled partnership will resolve its differences. Will DeMann buy out Oseary and Madonna, or vice versa? Considering the company's value is

somewhere in the \$150–200 million range, who is going to cough up the purchase price? (Warner Music Group owns a 50 percent stake, meaning DeMann's share is probably worth \$30–50 million.) If Warner Music Group co-chieftains Bob Daly and Terry Semel spill the green, what do they get? Half of Maverick? Would Maverick still be Maverick without the veteran DeMann's industry savvy? Could the

imprint still sign hit artists without Oseary's Midas touch? And how does the rumored Guy O./Maddy film and TV development company impact negotiations?

Over at Columbia Records, the recent move to acquire the services of Rick Rubin is already paying dividends, as Rubin proved to be the deal seal in winning the soundtrack rights to *Coming to America*'s smash animated series *South Park*. At the height of the bidding war, Arista, A&M, Interscope, Atlantic, Epic, Warner Bros., MCA, and Columbia were desperately pleading their case for the privilege to throw down \$1 million just for the rights, and another million minimum to fund the first record (the deal covers three LPs or four years, whichever comes first). Expect said album, due shortly, to feature Isaac Hayes's "Chef"



Guy Oseary



The multimillion-dollar quartet.

character in the role of the godfather of modern music, and to be crammed with serious star power.

Following in a long line of bands who zot their manager as soon as they hit the big time, **No Doubt** fired Tom Atencio amid rumors of a "Gwen Stefani" rift. One source close to the situation said that the intra-band tension has now mostly subsided, but also admitted that some have privately urged the singer to seriously weigh going solo... Latest word in the Toni Braxton/BMG legal saga has LaFace/Arista pulling their \$14 million deal off the table, and Braxton filing for bankruptcy à la TLC.... There's a new sheriff in town at the Disney music operation. After years of goofy, dopey, and downright awful market performance (most of it under the moniker Hollywood Records), legendary manager Bob Cavallo, whose Atlass/Third Rail company guides the careers of Seal, Prince, Alanis, Green Day, and Earth, Wind and Fire, among others, takes over a brain-dead operation with no roster, no catalog, and no profile. As far as industry reclamation projects go, this is as big as they come. Joe Fleischer



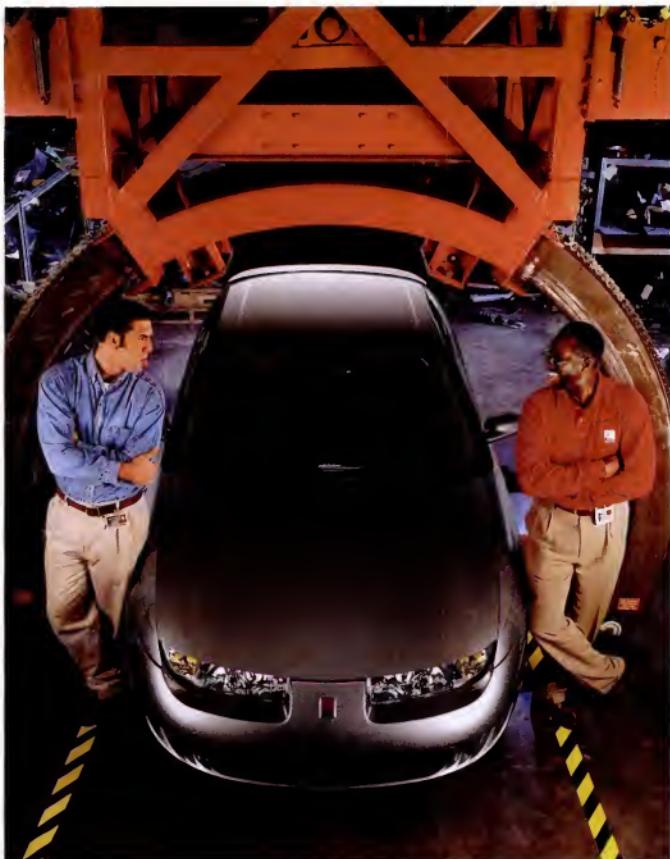
Alanis Morissette



It's a game of good-natured one-upmanship that has repeated itself since the first Saturn rolled off the line some seven years ago. One that is won by microns and microscopic stress fractures. And one that is played by folks like design engineer Byron Johnson and test engineer Will Bothe.

Byron's job is to make our cars last. Will's job is to tear them apart. (It's as close to a rivalry as you're likely to find around here.)

Which is to say, they don't go at it like Democrats and Republicans. But they still manage, in the most Saturn of ways, to get in their digs. Say a part Byron designed doesn't pass Will's tests. Then let the taunting voice-mails begin. And if it does? Then the reverse holds true. Now, this sort of competition isn't limited to Byron and Will; it's repeated by each of the 500 engineers who work here. Each giving a mock insult here, a good-natured jab there. Ultimately ending in some really great cars waiting at your friendly Saturn retailer.



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Thirty-nine-year-old Madonna Louise Ciccone could easily have hacked out an album of Babs-and-Celine-style schmaltz and laughed all the way to the ashram. Instead, says **Barry Walters**, she delivered *Ray of Light*, the riskiest, most revealing record of her career. **Photographs by Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin**



When a musician rooted in an underground sensibility achieves massive success, she has three options: She can stick to what she knows until the public grows bored and inspiration dries up; she can maintain her popularity by sucking up to the latest commercially guaranteed comey-ass formula; or she can leap into the aesthetic unknown, hoping that her instincts carry her and fans follow.

A naturally restless soul, Madonna couldn't have selected option number one. She would have gone insane from the repetition. She could have—like plenty of her superstar peers—chosen option two. It would have been easy for the Material Girl to hook up with Puff Daddy, raid her old workout tapes for samples, employ some soon-to-be-shot-at rappers for street cred, and watch the Benjamins march on in. Madonna-meets-Puffy-meets-Ronco-meets-the-Wu-Tang-Clan? You know the youth of America would be all over that shit.

As much as she's perceived to be pop's shrewdest businesswoman, Madonna has rarely taken the most direct route to the bank. Working deviance-phobic nerves with the queer boys and girls of her *Sex* book was not exactly playing it safe. There has to be a surer way of getting paid than creating a decade and a half's worth of gay nightife soundtracks. She's obviously made a few unpopular cinematic choices. So the only real option for the sole '80s icon still thriving in the '90s was to make the kind of record she puts on her boom box—a blend of haunted singer/songwriter introduction and beat-savvy electronic exotica that may not play in Topeka, if U2's *Pop* is any indication.

In doing so, Madonna still pushes buttons. Just as she once sang that she wasn't sorry for sharing her erotic fantasies, Madonna does not apologize for turning inward and employing the language she's learned while journeying to the center of her still-firm chakras. On her new album, *Ray of Light*, she sings about karma, quotes mystics, chants Sanskrit as she would in her yoga class, kisses emotionally stunted lovers good-bye, and croons a lullaby to daughter Lourdes as if her wattle breathed butterfly kisses. Her brazen vulnerability is destined to be someone else's touchy-feely-trendy hogwash; Madonna has not lost her ability to endear and annoy, and in its digitized, navel-gazing way, *Ray of Light* is Madonna's most radical, mask-free work.

The comparatively sexless tunes take their time to generate heat, but the sonic bacchanalia crafted by William Orbit (and, on four tracks, by Massive Attack associate Marius DeVries) is as propulsive as her nervously bolstered vocal chops are controlled. Despite *Ray of Light*'s aural hipness, Madonna asserts succinctly to the point of occasional—and affecting—awkwardness. When she sings to baby Lourdes, "You breathe new life into my broken heart," she turns each shamelessly sentimental syllable into the spine-tingly stuff of which sweet pop dreams are made.

"It looks like I just got out of bed," Madonna announces as she arrives at her neighborhood coffee shop without bodyguard, assistant, or publicist. "I did." She's dressed in a nondescript black knit shirt, black pants, and chipped black nail polish. Brown roots inches long lead to a tangled mess of brassy blond. At the end of the interview, Madonna politely refuses the reporter's request for a snapshot. "Maybe next time when I don't look like an old sea hog," she suggests. Throughout the interview, she remains candid, but rarely does the club

queen who would be king lapse into her infamous dis-intensive talk-show persona. She even tries to be kind about Yanni. Sometimes, I miss the old Madonna....

Spin: Why make another album? **Madonna:** Why breathe? Because I love it. Because I love making music. It's what I do. When I got this assignment, I wondered, "What can I possibly ask Madonna that hasn't been asked?" And then I thought, "Musici! I'll ask her about music!" So, for starters, how was making *Ray of Light* different than making your other records? Well, my daughter came to visit me every day in the studio so there were lots of baby interruptions; that's new. Mostly, though, I took a lot more musical chances. I let William [Orbit] play Mad Professor. He comes from

"I like the Spice Girls. Every time someone says something bad about them, I say, 'Hey, wait a minute, I was a Spice Girl once'"

a very experimental, cutting-edge sort of place—he's not a trained musician, and I'm used to working with classically trained musicians—but I knew that's where I wanted to go, so I took a lot more risks. Oftentimes, the creative process was frustrating because I wasn't used to it; it took a lot longer than usual to make this record. But I realize now that I needed that time to get where I was going. What's the songwriting process like between you and your collaborators? Well, it happens differently every time. In William's case, he would often give me tapes of snippets he was working on—eight-bar phrases, 16-bar phrases, stripped-down versions of what you hear on the record. And I'd listen to them over and over and it would just inspire lyrics. I'd start writing a little bit and then I'd go back to William and say, "Okay, let's expand on this musical idea." And as we'd expand on the music, I'd expand on the lyrics. That was true for most everything except for the album's last track, "Mer Girl." I decided I would write a song to the music as given to me, and when William asked me if I wanted to do something with it, I said, "I want it just like it is, I want you to put the tape up right now and I'm going to sing to it." And I did it in one take. For "Frozen," a song I wrote with Pat Leonard, I was obsessed with the movie *The Sheltering Sky* and that whole Moroccan/orchestra/super-romantic/man-carrying-the-woman-he-loves-across-the-desert vibe. So I told Pat that I wanted something with a tribal feel, something really lush and romantic. When he started playing some music, I just turned the DAT on and started free-associating and came up with the melody. How has your approach to vocals changed with this album? You seem to be going for a more European approach to singing, almost operatic, less colloquial. I studied with a vocal coach for *Evita* and I realized there was a whole piece of my voice I wasn't using. Before, I just believed I had a really limited range and was going to make the most of it. Then I started studying with a coach. God bless her. My secret dream is to sing Italian art songs, so at the end of my lesson my teacher would let me sing Italian operetta. Maybe that affected me unconsciously. *Ray of Light* is a very soulful record, but it sounds nothing like contemporary soul, à la Mary J. Blige. Have your feelings about black culture and black music changed? I don't think that a lot of soul

searching is going on in soul music these days, so in that respect it's pretty disappointing and uninspiring. There are definitely artists whom I respect and admire, but for the most part R&B is not what it used to be. Why do you think that is? There seems to be a certain kind of formula that is getting over right now. No disrespect to Puff Daddy—he's a real pioneer in a lot of ways—but to constantly recycle other people's music is not very inspiring. You're just hearing things you've already heard before. It makes you want to sing along but you're not really going to another place with it. As I was driving over here, I was listening to the radio and there was this Stevie Wonder song. Where is somebody who writes like that now? It's so sad. I guess Babyface comes closest, but I consider his stuff more pop. I can't think of anybody who's as deep and as lay-

ered as Stevie Wonder. Instead we get the cartoon version of life, being powerful, rich, and having beautiful women. I don't think they are setting out to push the envelope or take music to another level. It's about intention. What are they in for? How have your intentions changed in making music? I feel a lot more aware of the influence and the impact I have on people. In the beginning of my career I just did whatever I wanted to and if it made me feel good, if it was fun, that was cool. Now I feel like everything we do—the movies we make, the music, the stuff that's on television—affects society in a potent way. I feel a sense of responsibility because my consciousness has been raised and I would like to impart the wisdom I have to others without being corny or preachy. Do you feel you have been irresponsible before? To a certain extent, yes. But I guess I'll chalk that up to youth. Was there anything in particular that you feel was irresponsible? I was guilty of buying into this culture that thrives on ripping other people up, and I regret that, I truly do. People always think that they have to humiliate and denigrate others in order to make themselves appear stronger or better or smarter or cooler, but in the end it has the opposite effect. I'm much more aware now, and when you're aware you have a responsibility. How have you come to this awareness? It's just a process, a process of asking questions, making mistakes, and being hurt. My daughter has had a lot to do with it. Having a child and questioning my own mortality and feeling incredibly responsible for someone else's life and being aware of how my behavior affects her—you have to step back and realize that we all affect each other. You're one of the few celebrities who's grown up in public in a positive way. Me and Michael Jackson [laughs]. Yeah, I guess I have. I look at pictures of myself 15 years ago or watch myself on television or read interviews and think, "Who is that?" It's like looking at your high-school graduation picture and you sit there and go, "What a geek! Why did I have my hair like that?" So many of your contemporaries have hit the skids, and even great talents like Prince, Michael Jackson, George Michael, U2, and R.E.M. are not selling huge numbers, are not getting the same respect they once did. You're still selling records, still moving ahead creatively. Why is that? Everybody you mentioned is extremely talented, so I don't think it has to do



with talent. It's a tricky life we lead. You really have to find that place of caring but not caring what people think. Where you are desirous of things and you want to be successful and you want to make music that reaches people but you also can detach yourself from it. That's really hard to do. How have you managed to do that? Well, getting the shit kicked out of me on a regular basis is a very humbling experience. From the very beginning of my career, people have been writing shit about me and saying, "She's a one-hit wonder, she'll disappear after a year." Maybe that's all been a good thing, because I've never felt like my shit didn't stink.

You've created interesting work with all kinds of different people—from Babyface to William Orbit, from Shep Pettibone to David Foster—and I was wondering what you think you bring to the table? **Angst!** [Laughs] I don't know, a certain vulnerability and a certain strength. I feel like everybody I work with, I push them to another level. When I work with people who seem upright, I open them up. I try to get them to go off the beaten path, to improvise and throw the rules out the window. When I work with somebody who's very chaotic and disorganized like William, then I have the opposite effect: I let the line and become more focused. Crack the whip. William's a genius, but he's completely disorganized. He told me that he wasn't really used to being around people. Exactly. It was a kind of a culture shock. We had lots of problems. Things went haywire and everyone got frustrated because we were working with samples and synth sounds and Pro Tools and not with live musicians, and shit would keep breaking down and nobody would know how to fix it. We'd be sitting there relying on one machine, and I'd be thinking, "This is fucked." So we had lots of uphill battles. But we got through it. It must have been a real challenge; here you were, coming off of your voice lessons, and Eva, and here's William, who's not known for

working with voices at all. But that's the beauty of it. What I wanted was his sensibility, the textures, the really high-tech sounds. But William also works from a very melancholy place. I've been a big fan of his for years and I just knew our collaboration would be something beautiful. How do you pick who you're going to collaborate with? I'm sure you could have anyone you want. Well, I could, but I always go for the cook in the kitchen [Laughs]. I like to work with people who take chances. Usually they're undiscovered, because once people are

everything, but it was such a brilliant song. Do you have any other current favorites? I was into the *Verve* until "Bitter Sweet Symphony" was played on the radio every two seconds. Let's see, there's this new group called Al. Their album is fierce. I always respond to songs that have a bittersweetness to them, something haunted, but with a really visceral groove to it. Have you heard the Stereo MCs remix of the Tricky song "Makes Me Wanna Die"? That is the bomb. I like to put that on in my car and play it so loud that my car is vibrating and

"I'll never have mainstream acceptance, never. I mean, I'm an unwed mother. I've kissed girls in public"

successful people don't like taking risks. But you've worked with Patrick Leonard all along. Yes, on songwriting, but not production. We write great songs together, but from the production point of view, the music that I listen to comes mostly from England and France, and there's a certain European sensibility that I couldn't have gotten from an American producer. Why is that? There's a greater acceptance of cutting-edge things there. That goes for fashion, film, music. There is a real competitive thing going on in England about who can be the most creative. In America, it's who can sell the most records, who can have the biggest box-office receipts. I'm much more inspired by the stuff coming out of Europe than I am out of America. Like who? Björk. Everything but the Girl, Tricky and Martine. What about Björk attracts you? She's incredibly brave and she's got a real mischievous quality about her. I find her very compelling, really daring. How about Everything but the Girl? There's a plaintive quality to Tracy Thorn's voice that I really respond to. And that song, "Missing"? I know they've played the shit out of it and I'm over it and

you can see the doors bending out. Do you remember saying in an interview that techno equals death? Yes. Do you still believe that? To a certain extent. There was a type of techno I was listening to that had a real emotional void. But I think it's developed into something else and now there's feeling and warmth to it. You can attach it to humanity and before I couldn't. I couldn't feel anything. How do people like William Orbit or Manu DeVries bring warmth to a synthesizer or a machine? They don't. I do. They bring the cold, I bring the warmth [Laughs]. Certain people are going to suggest that even since you signed Prodigy to Maverick you've turned into this electronic-head. Veronica Electronic, thank you very much. My alter ego [Laughs]. What do you think of Goldie? I tried to get him to work on one of the tracks from *Ray of Light*. Nellee Hooper played a bunch of early demos for him and he fell in love with "To Have and Not to Hold." We sent him the master tapes and he said he wanted to work on it by himself and then we never heard from him. Oh well, I guess he was busy. Fiona Apple? I love the way she sings. I'm

The Making of *Ray*

Ray of Light began like all Madonna albums begin—with meetings between the singer and a songwriting collaborator. The first took

place in May 1997 with

Kenny "Babyface"

Edmonds, who

cowrote and produced

Madonna's biggest

sellout album,

"1995,"

"Take a Bow."

"We came up with

a couple of songs we

liked before she

changed her idea

about the album's

direction," remembers

Babyface. "They had a

"Take a Bow"-ish kind

of vibe and Madonna

didn't really need to

rehear it herself."

(This wasn't the first time Madonna had ditched entire batches of completed songs. For '94's *Bedtime Stories*, she wrote a dozen tracks with *Erotica* cohort Shep Pettibone in what the songwriter/producer calls a "Spinners style" before abandon-

ing the project.)

Madonna next turned to Rick Nowels, the producer/unesmith specializing in female pop/dance divas (Celine Dion, Anita Baker, Stevie Nicks). The summit suggested nothing of the album's future electronic direction, but it did yield constructive results—several songs in nine days. Three of them, "Material Girl," "Power of Goodbye," and "Take a Bow,"

"We came up with a couple of songs we liked before she changed her idea about the album's direction," remembers Babyface. "They had a 'Take a Bow'-ish kind of vibe and Madonna didn't really need to rehear it herself."

"A lot of what it means to be a good songwriting partner for Madonna is to have her be comfortable sitting in a room with you so she's free to bring out what she's been holding back," Nowels, "I was there to give her some chords, accompany her music, and get out of the way."

After Nowels, Madonna reuniited with her longtime collaborator Pat Leonard, who has cowritten and/or coproduced many of Madonna's greatest and most substantial hits since 1986,

including "Live to Tell," "Open Your Heart," "Material Girl," "Like a Prayer," and "Like a Prayer."

But unlike those hits, which he and Madonna produced together, Leonard's songwriting contributions to *Ray of Light*—the singles "Frozen," "Skin," "Nothing Really Matters," "Sky Fit Heaven"—were accompanied by much less of his studio input. "Pat's production would have lent the songs more of a Peter Gabriel vibe," says Madonna, "and that's not what I was looking for."

Instead, Madonna took her Leonard collaborations and rearranged them in the studio with William Orbit, the producer/remixer/label-owner/recording artist who's been blinding under-

ground grooves with pop since the mid-'80s and is now acknowledged as one of Madonna's peers.

"I'd never worked in a place [New York's hit factory] where the walls are covered with the artist's Gold and Platinum records," Orbit confesses. "When we first started and she'd want me to create the spot, I would freeze up. Madonna's very hands-on, and that was a challenge for me. I usually keep the artist away. And there was a lot of pressure from Madonna to do things that I had never dealt with. There are a lot of people depending on Madonna to maintain their livelihood and maybe they're not driven by the same artistic impulses as she is."

The recording of *Ray of Light* was complicated over a four-and-a-half-month period, the longest ever for a major artist who likes to keep her artistry in constant motion, focused, and fast. Most of the time there were only four people in the studio—Orbit, Madonna, engineer Pat McCarthy (slated to produce the next R.E.M. album), and his assistant engineer Matt Silva—together with mountains of machinery. Orbit brought literally

a ton of his own equipment and provided nearly all of the instruments, including a piano. "My fingers were so soft they would bleed," he recalled. With her range expanded and her confidence increased by her *Evita* voice coaching, Madonna's vocals came rather easily compared to the hours upon weeks spent on the instrumentation. Many of the vocal tracks were laid down in one take, says Orbit, with the tracks to re-create that didn't come until the first time. "A few notes are missed here and there, but the vocals have the right impact and that's much more important."

Despite the pressures of tending to a superstar artist, says Orbit, the collaboration between the two was thoroughly rewarding, if a bit draining (synth programmer Manu DeVries was brought in to help Orbit's conclusion to add some finishing touches and a jolt of energy). "I hadn't been so inspired in a long time," says Orbit of the *Maddie* experience. "She's precise and definitive, and her hearing is less guided. If she wasn't a pop star she could be a great producer. She genuinely loves music." B.W.



Babyface and
Madonna

EVE SHARED
THAT APPLE
AND LOOK WHAT
HAPPENED.

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MAKE THE SAME
MISTAKE!



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attracted to the dark and she's so dark. **The Spice Girls**? I like them. I know I'm not supposed to. Every time someone says something bad about them, I say, "Hey, wait a minute, I was a Spice Girl once." **How do you feel about New Age music?** Like what? Like Yanni? It's kind of like the way I feel about beige carpeting. It's okay, but I don't want it in my house. **Do you consider contemporary artists like Björk and Everything but the Girl your peers?** Well, their music inspires me. Does that make someone my peer? I don't know who my peers are, to tell you the truth. I know it's not Garth Brooks [laughs]. I know I fall into the superstar category, but I don't feel an affinity with any other music superstars. I'm too left-of-center. I'll never have mainstream acceptance, never. I've had moments of it, fleeting moments, but I don't think my sensibilities are palatable to the mainstream. I mean, I'm an unwed mother. I've kissed girls in public.

I was playing your back catalog, and it occurred to me that you've written some of your best records in the aftermath of painful relationships. *Like a Prayer* was post-Sean, *Erotica* was post-Warren. Is performing those songs more difficult than performing the frothier stuff? No, it feels good, I mean, I feel sad when I'm doing it, but I'm reveling in the sadness. I'm a drama queen! Melancholy and sadness are great music to roll around in. One of the saddest songs on the album is "The Power of Goodbye." Are you any better at breakups these days? Oh no. I suck every time! I'm the worst. I don't want to say good-bye to anyone. That's so boring. Why can't I have all of my lovers for the rest of my life? Was



12 Angry Ravers

Madonna's electronica makeover is tried in the People's Court

Spin recently selected a jury to judge *Ray of Light*'s credibility as cutting-edge club music. Instead of the traditional 12, our vox populi is a baker's dozen of 13—matching the number of tracks on *Ray of Light* and chiming with Madonna's latest obsession, the Cobras (Jewlyh mystical numerology in which 13 is a lucky number). Sequestered at Temple Records, downtown Manhattan's shrine for underground dance vinyl, our jurors—rave kids, techno purists, and devout Madonna-philes—discussed several of the album's tracks. Court forewoman: Victoria DeSilvio

13 Jurors and their musical biases

1 Grand, 22	Simon & Garfunkel	techtop jungle
2 Kristen, 22	Portishead	8 Piya, 13
3 Frank, 24	Madonna	Marcy Playground
4 Mike, 28	Isolée, Alex Cortez	9 Jen, 17
5 Rebecca, 24	Christian Vogel	Chester Copperpot
6 Evan, 25	Jeff Mills; Mikä, 14	10 Tyte, 22
7 Kai, 19		Curve, Come Clean
		11 Toby, 20
		DJ Funk, Bad Boy Bill
		12 Lee, 26
		Meat Beat Manifesto
		13 Joe, 23
		Chicago house

Ray of Light made during your breakup? Which one? [Laughs] With Carlos Leon? Part of it, yes. But there are songs on *Ray of Light* where I am talking about somebody who hurt me and it's not about Carlos. I drew from my past and my present and things that haven't even happened to me. But I'm sure they will. How have your relationships with men changed over the years? I think I'm a lot less selfish than I used to be. I'm more willing to say I'm sorry, to give in. Before, even if I knew that I fucked up or I was a shit, I still wouldn't say it. Just couldn't. Do you still fall in love easily? Yeah. It's pathetic. Do you think you make the same mistakes over and over? Uh-huh. That can be a scary thing to figure out. Oh, well. Let's not examine my personal life too much. Well, this new album is so much more personal, so I want—Is it? I think so, don't you? But my other albums were personal, too. *Bedtime Stories* was personal, because my *Erotica* was personal. Maybe I'm a better writer now, I hope so. I think on my last few records I've been operating from a place of anger and frustration and bitterness and feeling like a victim and being very defensive. I don't feel that way right now. Have you accepted the fact that you can't create a lover as you would anything else in your life? Well, actually, it's all the same. The best creations are things that you allow to sort of be, that you accept, that you're not afraid of, that you want to embrace. You can't force a perfect lover any more than you could force a song or poem. Someone said to me that there's a parallel between your album and Sandra Bernhard's new one-woman show, that they both involve "aging careerist divas and their self-analytical dreams."

We're all aging, honey, is all I have to say. I have a career and I am analyzing myself, so I don't consider it an insult. I'm just facing my life. **Are you seeing a therapist these days?** I am. Sure. But I would also say that reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* was just as influential as a week's worth of shamanic sessions. With songs like "Shanti/Ashtanga" and "Sky Fitz Heaven," you're being very up-front about your interest in Eastern spirituality. What's your spiritual life like? I feel that talking about it trivializes it. [Deep breath] I've been studying the Cabala, which is the mystical interpretation of the Torah. I studied Buddhism and Hinduism and I've been practicing yoga and obviously I know a lot about Catholicism. There are indisputable truths that connect all of them, and I find that very comforting and kind. My spiritual journey is to be open to everything. Pay attention to what makes sense, be absorbed. For me, yoga is the closest thing to our real nature. **When did you turn to yoga?** When I gave birth to my daughter, I had a cesarean, and I couldn't go back to working out the way I used to. A friend turned me on to yoga and I went through several teachers until I found the kind I like, Ashtanga Yoga. When I first started, I couldn't do any of the poses. I used to call the balancing positions "the humiliation positions." I kept falling and falling. Then little by little I got there, but as soon as you figure something out, there's something a lot harder you've got to go to next. It's actually a good metaphor for life.

For Madonna soundclips and links to previous articles in Spin, log on to **SPINonline** at keyword: **Spin on AOL**.

really bad accent. I don't speak Hindi, but she is killing my culture.

Frank: Madonna is the best borrower in the business—that is her talent. She always makes it interesting. I enjoy this track because it makes me feel groovy.

Mike: I really don't think techno was meant to have words. When you add them, it takes away from the music.

"Frozen"

Tye: "Frozen" works because it flows—the music and the vocals. It's a good choice for a single.

"Little Star"

Jen: This is pu

than a bottle of NyQuil. I'm dozing.

Tye: You can't look at it as a techno

record. If you look at it as a pop record, it is more interesting than Hanson and other Top 40 stuff.

Frank: Fuck technol if you approach it that way, you'll hate it. Enjoy it for what it is. It's a very meditative album—probably her most personal work. She is defying her old formulas. It's a risk and it may backfire, but I'm still glad that she feels confident enough to try it. I give her credit—she's still making the music she wants.

Toby: Go, Madonnal

Frank: A couple of years ago people said that she would become an Adult Contemporary artist. She's defied them all and I give her credit. Kudos. ■

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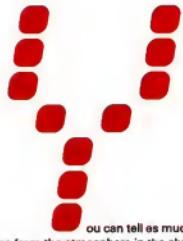
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Go



Meaty, Beaty, Big and Bouncy

*Forget Britpop, forget electronica—
Big Beat is the Next Big Thing.
Tony Marcus discovers why this
English sound is uniting hip-hoppers,
punk rockers, and pill-poppers
Photographs by Jake Curtis*



Ou can tell as much about a dance scene from the atmosphere in the club's toilets as on its dance floors. To walk into the men's room of the Big Beat Boutique in Brighton, England, is to enter a house of lunacy. For a start, there are just as many girls here as guys, all waiting to get into the sole cubicle. Every time someone leaves, there's a spontaneous cheer from the massive line,

Spin control: Norman Cook looks askance at the mayhem he's incited.



Brighton rocks: letting it steam at the Big Beat boutique.



Grin and baring it: DJ Norman Cook, a.k.a. Fatboy Slim, cuts up rough on the turntables.





as if they're all attending some kind of sporting event. There's also a camera crew—who appear to be completely blasted on Ecstasy, red-faced and sweaty—filming a boy who's break-dancing in front of the sink.

"All you fucking men should get out of here and leave the two to the ladies," snarls an attractive but definitely trashed-out-of-her-box girl. "That's great, love," beams the cameraman. "Can you say that again so we can film you?" Meanwhile, the boy next to me at the urinal has got problems. Both his hands are occupied holding a cigarette and a bottle of lager. The girl beside him helps out by unzipping his fly. "That's it, darling," he purrs. "Now if you can just roll back my foreskin." He starts to urinate. She giggles. "Thanks," he sighs, "that's lovely."

The Boutique's dance floor is pretty unzipped too—a typically unclassifiable Brighton crowd of art students, S&M devotees, ravers, mods, and queers, all buzzing on diverse cocktails of drink and drugs. The crowd rings DJ Norman Cook in a halo of wasted human energy. Cook—better known as Fatboy Slim—is also "off his tits," having knocked back a naughty pill of Ecstasy just before going onstage. Stopping a record to scratch a single beat in and out of a rising sonic storm, Cook doles out euphoria with just a flick of his slender fingers. The noise is incredible, something akin to AC/DC at their most tumultuous, but freeze-framed—the DJ cutting and retriggering the power chord to end all worlds. To a chorus of teen-screams, Cook gives his audience the rave 'n' roll rush they crave. He cuts the big beat



Beats working: Skirt Records boss Damian Harris is giddy with delight following his lucrative Sony deal.

in and out, in and out, then releases it to ram-page through the speakers. And everyone goes absolutely bonkers.



J/producer Norman

Cook is currently the cool ruler of Big Beat. Pioneered by the Chemical Brothers, Big Beat's mix 'n' blend of hip-hop breakbeats, rock riffs, and techno noise is blaring out of the radio and gnawing its way into the charts. In its homeland, Big Beat is being hyped by the English music press and record industry as the Next Big Thing after Britpop, while in America it's already made its way onto MTV, both a Buzz Bin video and as irresistibly peppy background music. Chemicals' sound-alikes the Prophets have been signed by DreamWorks for a reportedly Prodigy-size figure [see sidebar, page 88]. And leading Big Beat label Skirt has just inked a multimillion-dollar deal with Sony.

Where Britpop's foundations are whiter-than-white '60s pop, Big Beat's roots are a confused tangle of techno, jungle, punk, funk, and heavy metal. Unlike electronica's deliberately faceless underground producers, though, Big

Beat artists have embraced Britpop's doctrine of stardom-at-all-costs; they like to play live and love to talk about their drink-and-drug exploits to the music press. And "the kids" lap it up. Big Beat appeals to ravers, because it's compatible with taking illegal stimulants and dancing like a maniac. But it also appeals to rockers: They can scour the music press for tales of hell-raising mayhem, à la Oasis, and unlike techstep jungle or speed garage, Big Beat doesn't sound avant-garde or alienating or "too black." In fact, it's as familiar as your most dog-eared albums: a pirate raid on pop history, a grand audio theft that ransacks the most tried-and-tested licks from Lee Perry, Grandmaster Flash, Led Zeppelin, and Edwin Starr.

"Today's forward-looking music is about plunder," declares Chemical Brother Ed Simons. The Chemicals' entire career has been a massive extravaganza of piracy, whose booty includes hip-hop's block-party breakbeats, jungle's complex rhythm-programming, and acid house's hypnotic bass riffs. Even their original name, the Dust Brothers, was stolen outright from the American production duo behind the Beastie Boys' *Paul's Boutique* and Beck's *Odelay*. The Chems' spirit of shameless thievery informs everything about Big Beat, even though Simons and partner Tom Rowlands now distance themselves from their bastard child, preferring to consider themselves "mature" album artists closer in spirit to psychodeli-



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rock. "My problem with Big Beat records is that everything's done for the DJ," complains Simons. "It's all huge drops and builds, whereas a good record should groove a bit more."

Simons has unwittingly put his finger on one of the best things about Big Beat: the way its crescendo-crammed tracks are designed as tools for the DJ, as raw material that the turntablist can plug into the mania of the DJ/club/dance-floor interface. These are the reasons why Norman Cook is making Big Beat and why—unlike the Chemical Brothers—he enthusiastically embraces the term.

Cook is a perfect icon for a sound based around a Frankenstein-like patchworking of dismembered bits of other music. Back in the mid-'80s, he was the bassist in indie-janglepop hitmakers the Housemartins. Swerving in a seemingly unlikely dance-floor direction with his next group, Beats International, Cook scored a U.K. No. 1 with a dubbed-up remake of the S.O.S. Band's "Just Be Good to Me," before retreating underground, where he crafted a series of clubland smashes in a plethora of styles under a number of aliases: Freakpower, Pizzaman,

Mighty Dub Katz, and now, Fatboy Slim.

"I try to make underground music, but it always comes out as pop," Cook says. These involuntary crowd-pleasing instincts stem, he says, from his desire to connect with the female side of his audience. "I make music for girls," he admits. Where techno purists boys, he complains, girls are hung up on a specific kick-drum or synth sound, "girls just like a good tune. Until recently I lived with three women. When I was working in my studio, if they didn't come in and say, 'What's this?' I'd always scrap the tune. That's the difference between pop and underground music."



Norman Cook's home—nick-named House of Love, and decorated with a collection of smiley-face memorabilia from the early days of U.K. rave—is in Brighton, the seaside town about an hour's drive from London that has its own counterculture of artists, musicians,

Six of the Biggest Beats Ever

You want this party started right, right?
SIMON REYNOLDS brings the noise

FATBOY SLIM

"Punk to Funk," from *Better Living Through Chemistry* (Skint/Astralwerks)

Of all the Fatboy classics—"Going Out of My Head,"

"Everybody Needs a 303,"

"Song for Lucy," the remix of Wildchild's "Renegade Master"—"Punk to Funk" is

Norman Cook's finest

moment. For a small eternity, it's just chunky beats and phat-verging-on-cheesy bass that wobbles like love handles at a Weight Watchers disco, then a cheezaheadic EZ-listening horn section fades up, huffing and puffing and blowing the roof off the sucker.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

"Loop of Fury," from the *Loop of Fury* EP (Junior Boy's Own/Astralwerks)

The Chem's at their most crudely rabble-rousing—a black-and-white riot of sluttering beats, cumulative fuzz guitar-riffage and floor-quaking electro sub-bass. Cheesy and

proud of it, the Chemical Brothers have yet to meet an old skool rap or classic rave cliché they haven't wanted to steal.

ÜBERZONE

"The Brain," from the *Space Kefid* EP (City of Angels)

The best producer working in "funkier breaks"—America's equivalent to Big Beat—California's Überzone brings a

sharilly chilly anally '80s electro feel to the party. Every hook in "The Brain" works as both melody and rhythm, chiming tablas, brain-earns scratching, itchy-and-squeaky ecid-house equippages, and icy plinks redolent of early-'90s English sleep-and-bend acts like Unique 3.

RASMUS

"Raving in the Wind" from the *Mass hysteria* EP (Boilish)

Old Skool rap sliced and diced into locked-groove gloriosities, 76 rpm aqueous voices, scratchadelic mayhem, fiery baselines, and jittery beats—Rasmus is shaping up as the most boisterous Big Beat provider after Fatboy Slim.

BENTLEY RHYTHM ACE

"Return of the Hardcore Jumble

Carbootech—
Roadshow," from *Bentley Rhythm Ace* (Skint/Astralwerks)

BRA may be a bunch of jockenpeeps, but they've shoo' nuff got skills. As with Fatboy's "Going Out of My Head," the killer hook is a frenetic power-chord rift that draws the dots between 1966 Mod's

amphetamine-frenzy freebeats and 1999 Big Beat's pills-and-Pils-fueled pandemonium.

MONKEY MAFIA

"Lion in the Hall" (Decapacination/Heavenly)

Medcap drums, stethoscopic tom-toms, more percussion than you can shake a stick at—DJ/producer Jon Carter stoops to all manner of audio stunts and cheap tricks in order to quiet the dance floor.

SIX BIG BEAT ANCESTORS

JEAN-JACQUES PERREY

"EVA" (Vanguard, 1970)

PIERRE HENRY and MICHEL COLOMBIER

"Psyche Rock," from *Messe Pour Le Temps Present* (Philips, 1968)

These two tracks—ones by EZ-listening Moog-maniac Jean-Jacques Perrey, the other by musical concierge composer Pierre Henry—sound like the music playing in the discotheque scene in every swingin' '60s movie you ever saw. Booker T. and the MG's hopped up on acid-spiked punch.

JOSH WINK

"Higher State of Consciousness" (Twinkin Acid Funk Mix) (Stunty Rhythms, 1995)

This dredged-up

Philadelphia-made the prototypical "funkier breaks" track—simple looped breakbeat, screeching "ecid builds" (Roland 303 bass riffs), vocals time-stretched to fraying point.

writers, actors, and weirdos. If anywhere is Big Beat's party capital, it's Brighton. Not only does it boast the Boutique club, it's also the base for Skint Records, whose roster includes Fatboy Slim, Lo-Fidelity Allstars, Bentley Rhythm Ace, and Hardknock.

The Skint sound is a hyper-electric mash-up of hip-hop boomboombastic and stadium-rock dynamics. "When I DJ, I'll play anything—hip-hop, disco, house, drum 'n' bass," explains Damien Harris, Skint boss and producer under the name Midfield General. "Big Beat DJing is more like listening to a jukebox, rather than a steady flow of mixing. I used to work in a record store for years, where I learned that there's probably 25 percent of any genre that's any good. So I play the good bits from everything. The only common denominator is that they've got to have a really big beat."

It sounds open-minded, but some would accuse Big Beat of parasitism—creaming off the crowd-pleaser elements from different sounds and scenes, but without ever innovating anything. Genres like jungle, house, and techno evolve through tunnel-vision focus and needlepoint

COLDCUT

*Beats +

Pieces*

(Ahead Of Our

Time, 1987)

Although their

current Ninja

turns output

gets filed as

"trip-hop,"

back in '87

Colcold pioneer the British fad for "DJ records," alongside such similar crews as S Express, Bomb the Bass, M/A/R/R/S, and Renegade Soundwave.

As funky as hip-hop but fast-paced enough to be played alongside house's metronomic beats, these breakbeat-and-weekly-sampling collages were Big Beat *avant le lettre*

DJ TRAX

"We Rock the Most," from the *I Man, I DJ* EP (Moving Shadow, 1992)

HYPER-ON EXPERIENCE

"Thunder Grov," from the *Dead in the Family EP* (Moving Shadow, 1993)

Hip-hop on Ecstasy, U.K. hardcore

rage was sheer Looney Toons mania.

Somewhere between a cartoon caper and a car crash, these Moving Shadow classics are the Slient sound five years too soon—which either makes hardcore astoundingly ahead-of-its-time, or Big Beat shamefully backward.

BIG BEAT COMPILEATIONS

Brass Beatz Volume One and Volume

Two (Skint)

Beck 2 Mono and the Second XI (Wall of Sound)

White Noise (City of Angels)

Live At the Social Volume 2 (Mixed)

by Jon Carter/Monkey Mafia)

(Heavenly)

Big Rock 'n' Beatz (TVT/Wax Trax)





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intricacy. "I have a helluva lot of respect for musical purists," concedes Harris. "It's true that you need that focus for the music to progress. But on the other hand, it's frustrating that anyone involved in that process seems to get blinkered toward other forms of music." Blinker-free, Big Beat uses Technics turntables and sampling technology to steal anything that isn't nailed down. In the digital age, where any recorded source can be converted to zeros and ones, this means that everything is fair game. A true Big Beat brigand loots across the spectrum of rap and rave subgenres, ignoring the class and race boundaries that separate different scenes.

In the early '90s, British house and techno were shaped to heighten the rush and buzz of Ecstasy. DJs favored long, fluidly mixed sets that enhanced the cocooning, sensurround sensations caused by MDMA. Big Beat's jagged eclecticism reflects a post-E dance culture. Kids are fueling their fun with polydrug cocktails that may include any or all of the following: E, amphetamine, cocaine, ketamine, 2CB, pot, booze, acid, psilocybin mushrooms, downers like temazepam, and so on. Big Beat music similarly jumbles up sounds that were originally associated with specific drugs: marijuana/jungle, MDMA/house, cocaine/garage, amphetamine/hardcore, alcohol/rock. "I do think England's love affair with Ecstasy is on

the wane," says Harris. "A lot of people have gotten bored with E, and they can't handle the comedowns. Big Beat's drugs of choice are lager and amyl nitrate."

The amyl connection goes back to the birthplace of Big Beat—a now-legendary club called the Heavenly Social, where the Chemical Brothers were resident DJs. Back in the club's 1994-95 heyday, nobody used the term Big Beat, though. Instead, people talked about "amyl house," a reference to the club's most popular high, "poppers": the inhalant amyl nitrate, whose fumes offer an instant peak akin to Ecstasy but much briefer. A small Sunday nightclub in the basement of a Central London pub, the Social was the brainchild of Heavenly, a record label/artist management and p.r. company famous for its hedonistic punk-meets-rave attitude. "We started the Social in August '94," recalls Heavenly's Robin Turner, "because the Chemicals were DJing all these back rooms in glitzy house clubs. Ed and Tom would be spinning in the back to about 30 of their friends—people who looked like freaks and who wanted to go out and get fucked-up on pills, then wake up the next morning covered in bruises and think, 'Oh God, how did I get that? Must've jumped off the speaker stacks!'" Turner decided that somebody had to take the Chemical Brothers' backroom scene and turn it into the main event.

Even though the 200-capacity Heavenly Social was tiny compared with other London clubs, it rapidly acquired a high profile. On a typical night—or so the media mythology runs—you'd find Tricky and Paul Weller popping up the bar, and various members of Primal Scream, Oasis, and the Stone Roses sipping a drink or three. Alongside these Britpop luminaries were many of Big Beat's future prime movers: Mark Jones and Sarah Francis (respectively founders of the currently hot labels Wall of Sound and Bolshii) were soaking up the vibe, while Richard Fearless (now in Death in Vegas), Jon Carter (a.k.a. Monkey Mafia), and Norman Cook shared the DJ booth with the Chemicals.



Though its ethos of mixing up the styles and listening without prejudice is admirable, when it comes to mixing up different races and classes Big Beat looks less impressive than it sounds. Slip inside Sonic Mook Experiment, a new club promoted by longtime London scener Sean McClusky. DJ Barry Ashworth is sliding dancehall regga into hard-nosed hip-hop. In the basement, there's a crap band who think they're the



Da bomb: Alex Gifford, left, and Will White

The Next Big Beat

Prodigy-come-lately: Will Propellerheads blow up in the U.S.?

Tip for the top: Propellerheads

Knob twiddlers: Alex Gifford and Will White

Home base: Bath, England

Sound: An after-hours house party jacked up on Old School funk and raunchy techno pranks

Hawked by: Chris Doundas, host of PBS's Sessions at West 54th St. music series and A&R exec at DreamWorks, who dropped a considerable amount of Spielberg/Katzenberg/Geffen dough on the twosome in hopes of striking rockin' rockin' gold

What the fk is about:** Duo's full-length debut, *Decksanddrumsandrockandroll*, is a joyously huge mélange of jazz, house, and big-band beats, featuring cameos by glittering British überdiva Shirley Bassey and members of the Jungle Brothers and De La Soul.

Where the "androckandroll" comes in: Unlike most electronica outfitts, Gifford and White get busy on drums, guitars, and Hammond organs, as well as decks. "Generally, you think dance music is gonna be a couple of blokes with headphones on," explains Gifford. "But [our show] have got guts and personality. And panic."

Drug of choice: "Gin and tonic."

Why they do it: "I find it difficult to get close to people," Gifford admits. "It was normal behavior to go 'round someone's house and play tunes to seduce them, I think I'd do quite well. But in the real world, I'm a boring fucker who can't stop playing records."

Sylvia Patterson

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Liam Look-alike: Lo-Fidelity
Altura singer Wrecked Train
wants to be a rave'n'roll star.

Beastie Boys, a skinny white boy who can't sing trying to chat and flow over tightly programmed breakbeats and sprawling guitar feedback. Sonic Mook's crowd is wearing the Big Beat uniform: top-of-the-range Nikes, camouflage trousers, pencil skirts, spanking new Levi's, fur-collared parka coats, and fleeces. They dance to hip-hop, jungle, and dancehall reggae. But the weird, unnerving thing is that the crowd is almost entirely white. "I can't fucking stand it here," offers a boy in the toilets, in between dabs from a sachet of pink smoke. "Everyone's wearing black fashion and moving to black beats, but the only black people in the club are the three Ecstasy dealers. It just doesn't feel right."

It's tempting to take Sonic Mook as a symbol of what's wrong with Big Beat—a mainly white, self-consciously cool, media/music industry set tuning onto old skool hip-hop (Schooly D, Eric B.) ten years after the fact. Racial tourism is a long-running syndrome in British pop, going back to the mods with their passion for

American R&B. But there's another twist to this story: Big Beat is in many ways a replay of another British sound from six years ago—the multiracial, working-class-style of rave music known as "hardcore." Like Big Beat, 1991-92 hardcore was made from fast breakbeats, dub bass, and zany samples, a hybrid that eventually evolved into jungle. Which makes Big Beat something like jungle's retarded cousin—sharing the latter's hectic breakbeats and heavy bass, but favoring much more simplistic rhythm programming. "Jungle producers come up with some great production tricks, but as music I just can't get into it," says Cook. "It's all very intelligent. I don't really do intelligent music, I'm more into mindless boogie."



Big Beat's boogie can get pretty mindless. With DJs and artists often more wasted than their audience, it's like chemical excess as a spectator sport. "It's the old rock 'n' roll thing—you want the stars to be larger-than-life and more fucked-up than you are," says Norman Cook.

Like rock 'n' roll stars, Big Beat DJs get groupies too. Take the Girls Brigade, a gang of female London media-types who frequent the scene. Their exploits—which include sharing LSD with The Headnillaz, attending debauched post-Boutique sessions at Norman Cook's Brighton apartment, and vomiting at the feet of the Chemical Brothers during a Heavenly Social

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boat party—make the girl-hooligan's behavior in Prodigy's "Smack My Bitch Up" video look relatively tame. "From a groupie's point of view, Big Beat is wicked," says Miranda, one Brigade member. "The Big Beat lot are people you can get pissed with, 'cause they like to get really pissed. It's not hard to end up back at a DJ's flat after a club. I've met loads of people who've shagged Jon Carter."

Although its boorish antics seem to cross gender divides, Big Beat has become synonymous with the British phenomenon known as New Lad. Behaviorally equivalent to the frat boy, the lad is working class rather than a college student. A backlash against the '80s notion of the sensitive, feminized New Man, the New Lad has spawned an entire industry of masculine-and-proud-of-it products and media in the U.K. Perhaps the most successful is the huge-selling magazine *Loaded*—named after the Primal Scream rave'n'roll anthem "Loaded" and its sample from Roger Corman biker-movie *The Wild One*: "We wanna get loaded and have a good time." *Loaded* also happens to be the name of Skint's experimental sister label.

New Lad is a form of class tourism: middle-class English males envying the coarse vitality of their working-class counterparts, aping their pleasures in a cartoonish flurry of soccer, porn, lager, and kebabs puked up on the pavement in the wee hours of Sunday morning. Noel and Liam Gallagher are Superlads. When Noel collaborated with the Chemical Brothers on "Setting Sun," it was the cultural coup of the decade—Britpop's delinquency fused with

rave's 'avin' it hedonism.

Après "Setting Sun," the deluge. "You've got groups coming up now like Regular Fries and Campag Veloce," says Heavenly's Robin Turner, "all trying to approximate the Chemicals or Prodigy, who themselves were dance bands trying to approximate rock bands." Lo-Fidelity Allstars—Skint Records' bright hope—fuls for 1998—typify the new breed. Onstage, the Allstars combine rave music's sequenced rhythms with live musicianship. Or at least the appearance of live playing: For all the presence of a drummer onstage, most of the audible rhythm is programmed. Despite the fact that the euphoric high points of their show come from the machine beats and samples (like the vocal intro from The Breeders' "Cannibal") that's looped on their single "Disco Machine Gun"), Lo-Fidelity Allstars project themselves as a rock band; the singer emulates Liam Gallagher's surly cool. And the Allstars are received as rock by the audience, who mosh violently as if attending a Korn gig.



ig Beat could easily alienate both sides of the dance/rock divide: its music rampages across. Indeed, techno purists depise Big Beat as a regressive rockification of dance music, while trad-rockers dismiss it as inane party music without the redemptive power of your Verves or Radioheads. Yet right now

Big Beat seems all-conquering. It simultaneously uses rock'n'roll attitude to show how so much of today's electronic dance music is po-faced, and deploys club culture's sonic science to make trad guitar bands look terribly dated. That science is all about triggering the quintessential sensation that unites house, techno, and jungle, *the rush*—a synergistic energy-flash of MDMA, music, and sheer adrenaline.

Norman Cook is king of Big Beat because he knows how to manipulate the rush. His druggernaut remixes of Cornershop's "Brimful of Asha" and Wildchild's "Renegade Master" aren't "deep" or "meaningful": nothing exists but strategies for excitement, a collection of climaxes and multiple orgasms. "The less time I spend on a record, the better it seems to work," says Cook with a grin. "It's about capturing the moment. I don't try and make it too complicated. From funk to rock, rockabilly to rave, simplicity is what counts, immediacy is all. Big Beat, for all its faults, understands this.

See, the truth is that the greatest secret never told about rave culture was that it was always more rock'n'roll than rock itself. Instead of the rock star living out your wildest dreams for you, were your own private Jagger chemically hurtled across an ocean of delirious peaks and insatiable desires. Commandeer rave's pills and thrills, but packaging those illicit energies inside the appearance of rock form, Big Beat is 1998's number one bullet. Which leaves just one million-dollar question: Are you gonna bite? ■

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Give the Strummer Some

Musical compatriots Mary Lou Lord and Elliott Smith have seen each other at their greasiest—the morning after a gig in some college town, sipping Styrofoam-flavored coffee and loading the van for the next stop on the indie-rock two-lane. Throughout the '90s, the pair wrote, recorded, and toured together, two singer-songwriters able to quickly hush rooms full of long-haired flannel-flyers. Now, they're both on the road to bigger things: Lord has just released her major-label debut, *Got No Shadow*, while Smith's songs are prominently featured, at director Gus Van Sant's personal behest, in the recent film *Good Will Hunting*. Fame looming, the two nevertheless set aside time recently for some cigarettes and soul-searching

MARY LOU LORD: Whenever I hear you talk about songwriting you don't usually refer to "the song that I wrote." You usually say "the song I made up." Why is that?

ELLIOTT SMITH: I don't know. I guess it's more natural way for me to say it. "I wrote it" makes it seem like I sat down and figured it out. It's more like something that sort of pops into your head. It's a little attempt to deflate the process.

Your songs seem so offhandedly beautiful; they remind me of songs I loved growing up. Is there any kind of corny stuff that you liked when you were a kid?

You mean, like, skeletons in my closet?

You know: the Carpenters, Burt Bacharach, "This Guy's in Love With You." Oh, sure! I'm always happy to bring those out. That stuff is practically all I ever listen to anymore, songs that have something about them that would be really cool if you could extricate them from their ridiculous situations. For example, you don't have to be into the super-sappy words, but you might like the cool wah-wah guitar solo on Bread's "Guitar Man."

But whatever one person thinks is ridiculous may not be to somebody else, and you can take it out of that ridiculous situation and put it into your own ridiculous situation. Which I plan to do.

I saw you a while back with your band, and you would bust into that line from the Association's "Never My Love."

I think it's a great song.

It's beautiful.

I mean, some of the words, they're not words I could make up. I don't know if they're words I'd really want to sing. But it's such a beautiful song. It's got really cool chords. And I always liked parts of songs that are the turnaround, where it changes key and stuff. "Say Yes" [on *Good Will Hunting*] is a great example of that. It has a gorgeous turnaround in the bridge. That song sits right up there with "Never My Love." The Beatles' "Something" is another one. I have a big place in my heart for those types of songs—I always wonder, "How did somebody come up with that?" Do you ever surprise yourself when you write?

If I don't, then I don't like the song. I mean, I don't surprise myself like, "Whoa, that was brilliant," I never think that. But I surprise myself like, "Huh?" Like with "Say Yes," I wrote that song in five minutes. And I wrote "Between the Bars" [also on *Good Will Hunting*] right after that. Both of those I made up during this episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess* with the sound off, which is a great way to write songs. Your eyes are busy, so they don't get bored and they don't watch what your hands are doing, so then you can surprise yourself. Your hands can surprise you with things they know and that you don't.

I think that some of the best songwriters have also been people who have mastered the craft of listening. Maybe that's one of the reasons you can write—you can just listen forever and when you need a reference, it's in you. It just amazes me that there are these people who get hits on the radio and you sit there and you talk music with them and they have no idea what you're talking about. I think, "God, how did they get this far?"

Still, I know very well that my songs have no place on the radio. It's not because radio is a bunch of crap—it's just that radio doesn't play my kind of stuff. And I can't dress up my songs so that they'll fit on the radio, because they wouldn't be the same songs anymore—whereas your songs would be, you know? It's a kind of talent that you have that I don't. I wouldn't want to change to fit any kind of format, but there are a few changes that I made on the new record—compromises, maybe—with the production. Because I do want the songs to get the fairest shake they can. And if it has to sound a particular way to get on the radio, we've done that. It's like a beauty pageant. And the only way that I could get in is if I wore a blue bathing suit. [Laughter] And it wasn't much

effort to say, "All right, instead of the purple one I'll wear the blue one."

But, like, I can't wear the blue bathing suit, because I'm already wearing a red bathing suit! And whether or not anybody wants to see me in a red bathing suit, I'm gonna wear it. [Laughter] Because for me, the sound of the song is the same thing as the song you know, right? Both ways are cool, totally—I think it's great to have the flexibility to do what you did in production. But when I make up stuff, I can't imagine it in a lot of different settings.

Here's a question I get asked a lot: What would you say makes an acoustic song a folk song?

People seem to think that everything that's played on the acoustic guitar is a folk song, which is insane. It's a stylistic thing. Folk is distinguished from pop by almost always having a more to the story, a point. Whereas pop songs often don't really have any point—or they have multiple points, and none of them are especially clear. Both styles are obviously good, but for me, I like pop. It's more vague, there's more possibilities in it.

But people are always comparing you to the folkies of yore. Nick Drake is a big one. Bob Dylan. But I think you're more like Joni Mitchell. Do you listen to Joni?

Well [Laughs], I mean, I've heard Joni Mitchell before. But, like, I don't sound anything like her. That's not what I'm saying. It's more in the same way that girls latched onto Joni Mitchell, these kids really latched onto you. It's that self-confessional thing—it's just so sweet and beautiful. So not cynical. You know, a lot of people might say that your songs are sad—and, in a way, yeah, they are kinda sad. But for me they're like a vaccine against sadness—you have to take some in order to take it away.

They make me feel better, too. But then, if I were to look at the words, and pretend I'm not me, I would have to go, "Yes, this is pretty depressing."

It's kind of wild that you've become this acoustic heartthrob, don't you think?

A what?

A heartthrob.

Um, I don't feel like a heartthrob. C'mon, the last time you played in New York there were tons of Hollywood types there. I guess. I mean, I don't know who comes to see me play. The lights are pointed in the wrong direction and you can't see people unless they're right in front. And after the show's over I go right back to my hideout.

Tell me it wasn't fun going to the big *Good Will Hunting* premieres.

Yeah, they were pretty fun. I had fun at the one in New York because I wore my white suit with a big pink flower. I always seem to have fun when I wear that suit. ■

For more information on Elliott Smith and Mary Lou Lord, read their interviews on *SPINonline* at keyword: Spin on AOL.



Good song, fruitcake. - Al Smith
The new album, *Self Control*, is due in April.

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Opposite: (left) suede dress with wrap hood by Paco Rabanne. (Right) leather shirt by Istante by Versace; miniskirt by Versus by Versace.

This page: (left) sleeveless T-shirt by Helmut Lang Jeans; nylon vest from Helmut Lang; jeans by CK Calvin Klein Jeans. (Right) baseball cap from High Life Lounge; polo shirt by Lacoste; nylon vest by Katherine Hamnett Denim.



[Left] jacket, sweatshirt, denim hoodie, vest by G Star; vintage Madonna hat; glasses by Coach; sneakers by Fred Balmain [Right] polo-neck by Chinese sweat suit byether the Hammett Denim, the Trefoil bucket hat by Adidas.



RETURN OF THE B-BOY

The latest retro fever to grip the urbs and burbs? Eighties hip-hop, hold the irony

The youngest member of the Rock Steady Crew can't break-dance to save his life. He can't rap, can't DJ, and only rarely writes graffiti. Right now, though, he's proving himself quite an expert at chilling and bugging out.

Rocking a Bugs Bunny baby bottle and peeing from a car seat placed against a wall, five-month-old Ritchie Cypher Colón has his big brown eyes glued to his father, who is currently making Barney look like a pretty sad excuse for entertainment.

Wildly spinning on the smooth wood a few feet away, the senior Colón's sweatpants are a gray blur, as his legs—which one might call "crazy"—form a flying "V." They go around and around in an amazing gravity-defying act of skill and imagination that's one of the defining images of the '80s—and now, suddenly, all the rage at the end of the century.

We are in the Bronx's Point Community Development Corporation, a bustling sanctuary of art and goodwill in a neighborhood, Hunts Point, most recently famous for the HBO prostitution special, *Hookers at the Point*. Tonight, it's the site of B-boy legend Crazy Legs's breaking class. Baggy pant legs and bony arms move with mad abandon and varying skill levels. One kid with a wispy mustache slowly rotates himself in a headstand, his Yankees ski cap buffering the floor. A 14-year-old in a striped Hillfiger jersey throws himself into a "swipe" and comes crashing down with a thud—change rattling all over the room. A 15-year-old, born the year of Run-D.M.C.'s debut album, is off to the side working on his turtle.

The moves take a professional's dedication to master. And while the instructor's benter differs from what you might hear at London's Royal Academy of Ballet—"Don't put your hand down so fast or you'll look like a Herb"—there are clearly some serious acolytes in the room. The 32-year-old Legs stands watching one of his star pupils, 14-year-old Jason Mathis, finish off a dazzling floor routine. "That's looking nice," says Legs. "You just need to come out of it right."

"My headspin's phat, though, right?" says Mathis.

"Well, I ain't gonna lie to you. It's getting better."

"No, no, it's phat," Mathis says with a smile. He looks at the mirror. "It's phat."

No longer just def, dope, and funky-fresh, breaking—until recently consigned to the mass memory banks with Rubik's Cubes and Atari 2600s—is now, definitely, phat.

Suddenly, images of "chair freezes" and "windmills" are everywhere. They're in TV and magazine ads, giving flash and street cachet to Sprite. They're in music videos as diverse as Big Beat (Fatboy Slim), British party-rock (the Space Monkeys), house (Jason Nevins vs. Run-D.M.C.), and rap (Erick Sermon, Keith Murray, and Redman)—propelling all of them into heavy rotation on MTV. The video for Nevins's remix of Run-D.M.C.'s "It's Like That" scored a 59 (out of 60) on the channel's 12 *Angry Viewers*, the highest tally any video has received on the show. "Anything with breakin' or battlin,'" one panelist said, nodding in approval. "That rocked!" said another, who looked younger than the backspin. "That was fresh! Wicked awesome! Run it into the ground like a Bush video."

Outside the nostalgic gaze of MTV whelps, breaking has actually been going strong since its inception two decades ago. While the more Wal-Mart-friendly format of rap has enjoyed a good 16 years



of high visibility, the less easily commodified wings of Old School hip-hop have flourished largely unattested. Graffiti writing has evolved in both technical mastery and corporate savvy—with Old School legends like KEL 131 designing Web sites and the TATS crew doing murals for Coca-Cola—and turntable artistry has been pushed to absurd heights by cult stars like the Invisibl Skratch Picklz and the X-ecutioners.

Breaking, too, has been kept alive, largely by the dedication of the Bronx-born Rock Steady Crew, L.A.'s Air Force, and other teams across the world who host and perform at hip-hop summits and competitions. In the early '80s, coastal differences in styles—East Coast breaking was about athleticism on the floor, while the West Coast was the birthplace of the electric boogaloo, i.e., popping—would cause dancing battles (and the occasional fistfight) to erupt. Today, B-boys of all

stripes—who reject the term "break dancing"—are seen at raves, jungle clubs, and, naturally, on Manhattan street corners, where Crazy Legs's student William Sanchez reports pulling in \$100 performing for passersby on 42nd Street.

But breaking's mass renaissance is also driven by forces more elemental than burgeoning cult-dom. Eighties nostalgia is inevitable as we approach the crucial 20-year mark, but urban '80s nostalgia—for Old School graffiti, fashion, dance styles—has a momentum all its own. "Now that there's this big urban hip-hop movement going on, we've been able to push graffiti into corporate America in a way that no one has before," says New York graf veteran Nicer. Meanwhile, fashion statements like Air Jordans, Cazal shades, Kangol caps, Izod shirts, and other totems of ghetto cool are now coveted by the street-style everywhere. Even Sergio Valente has reissued a line of classic

jeans—doubtless to be worn with a pressed crease up the front.

Unlike the campy sporting of leg warmers or parachute pants, celebrating the urban '80s means, essentially, celebrating hip-hop, something few people do ironically. The all-star rappers on last year's *In the Beginning... There Was Rap* are positively reverential in their covers of the Sugarhill Gang and Too Short. The recently reissued soundtrack to the film *Wild Style* has been lovingly sampled by connoisseurs as diverse as the Beastie Boys, Nas, and Beck. Reemerging rap greats like Rakim and Big Daddy Kane are meeting a loving embrace from longtime devotees, and Public Enemy—possibly the most camp-proof act in pop history—have a much-awaited upcoming album tentatively due in the spring.

At the beginning of MTV's new rap retrospective, MTV's *Ultrasound: Back in the Day*, Grandmaster



Opposite: leather jacket by Schott; hooded sweatshirt by Jeremy Scott.

This Page: glasses by Cazal; shirt by Atsuro Tagama; leather skirt and leather belt by U Zone by Valentino.

Caz, MC Shan, and other veterans all express the exact same opinion about '80s hip-hop. Shan puts it the most pithily: "Hip-hop back then was a lot different. It was a lot more fun." In these days of murdered rap stars, bloated video budgets, and fourth-generation samples, original Old School somehow feels more alive, more raw, more fun. And few things are more fun to watch than breakin'.

"I don't look at it as nostalgia," says David LaChapelle, director of the Crazy Legs-choreographed video for the Spice Monkeys' "Sugar cane." "To me, it's just a great dance. It represents freedom and youth and ability and technique, but it also has this real urban edge. That's why you have a whole new generation of kids who are totally into it."

"People never stopped B-boying," says DJ, Vibe contributor, and hip-hop gadabout Bobbito Garcia. "It's just heads turned against it for a while." Garcia points to the arrival of dancing fools Hammer and Vanilla Ice as death, at least temporarily, for hip-hop floor styles. "After them, people didn't want to associate dancing with hip-hop, 'cause they were like, 'Yo that shit is wack, it's corny, it's played-out.' Hip-hop had to reinforce its legitimacy." Which left us with clubs full of guys leaning up against the wall nodding their heads.

This might seem to be changing with the advent of the all-dancing, all-rapping Puffy Ace. But the infectious celebration of personal skill and attitude that breaking embodies is something quite different from a 20-person, Busby Berkeley, Janet Jackson dance routine. And the chasm between mainstream rap and hip-hop's original essence has widened considerably.

Today's rap is about game and maneuvering; '80s hip-hop was about stunts, doing something extreme: scratching records, jumping fences to paint subway cars, spinning on your head, crafting outrageous rhymes. It was about freaking it. As Chemical Brother Tom Rowlands once said about Old School, "To us, [DJ Kool] Herc represents the time in hip-hop when anything was possible. You could flip Iron Butterly breaks with Chic records. There were no rules." And as any breaker knows, there's no more striking rule to break than the law of gravity.

Back in the Bronx, the battle is on. Crazy Legs has teamed best friends Jason Mathis and William Sanchez against two slight Latino kids named Alexis and Omar. It's been close so far, with stylish "top-rocking" by Alexis and deft footwork by Omar, who danced around his alternately planted hands like a sped-up game of Twister—then humped his crotch in Sanchez's face from a backbend.

Now, though, as the classic Sugarhill Records track "Apache" plays on the stereo, Sanchez and Mathis commence wax the competition.

They begin a synchronized routine that's strikingly graceful for such gangly little kids. They drop to the floor, pop back up, drop to a split, pop back up, spin in unison, windmill in unison, and, at precisely the same time, go into dual handstand freezes, legs akimbo. Right on the beat, they throw their legs around for one more spin, and flip back up to standing. It was moves like these that landed the duo a part in an upcoming Onyx video. The class breaks up in cheers.

Before the music started, Sanchez and Mathis seemed little more than apt conservatory students. Their feet went the right way, they didn't fall over, and their mastery met the teacher's approval. But with the tight snare cracks and loose-limbed bongo groove booming in the room, the footwork had become language. Suddenly, breaking was a fundamental aspect of hip-hop, far more than just a retro-vogue phenomenon. For a few minutes, you couldn't imagine the music without it. **Chris Norris**

These Are the Breaks

From bodyrocking to pop-locking, an unofficial guide to the B-boy basics

THE MOVES

THE UPROCK: Those ritualistic warm-up moves breakers do before they really get serious on the floor. Break-dancing moves, slang, and style vary from place to place—but this is generally the first thing a B-boy learns. Keep your torso still while your legs and arms circumscribe crazily in time to the beat.

THE BACK-SPIN: One of the most well-known moves, and the easiest, too. Whirl on the middle of your back with your head tucked in and your knees pulled up to your chest.

THE MOONWALK: Bill "Bojanines" Robinson invented it. B-boys perfected it. Michael Jackson popularized it: Walk backward while you mime a funky robot moving forward.

THE WORM: Looks like a human wave. Get on the floor in a push-up pose, chest to the ground, your feet pulled together and your knees slightly bent. Now kick your legs, stick your chest out, and undulate like a reptile.

THE UVKE (pop-lock style): Looks like what would happen if you stuck two of your fingers in an electric socket. Shuddering like you're being electrocuted, pretend the current runs through your arms, into your torso, down to your feet, and kick up to your head.

HEADSPIN: Do it headstand. Now spin. Note: The reason why B-boys wear hats. **FREEZING:** In the middle of any complicated move, pretend like you've suddenly turned into a statue and hold the pose for as long as you can.

THE WINDMILL: Become a human infinity symbol by spinning your torso around 360 degrees with your legs never touching the ground.

SUITIDE: Flat on your back and land flat on your back. The more air you get, the better. Once you perfect it, it doesn't even hurt.

THE GEAR

SNEAKERS: Puma Clydes, shell-toe Adidas, or Converse low-tops, of course. Color didn't matter, but every aspect of your outfit had to be color-coordinated, from your fat shoelaces to your wrist sweat-

band to the Kangol on your head.

THREADS:

Vinyl windbreakers were always popular because you could add more revolutions to your back-spin. Some folks preferred the more expensive sweat suit, often dark-colored Adidas with white

racing stripes. But it was imperative that each B-boy name or the name of their crew

embazoned on the back of any jacket in huge letters.

GLOVES: Sad but true: Michael Jackson once had a major effect on urban style. There were plenty of tough guys who sported the Jheri-curly-Thriller-jacket-and-solo-sparkly-glove look. White gloves were a favorite among West Coast pop-lockers because they made it easier for the crowd to follow their hands. Some breakers wore bicycle gloves to give them more friction when performing complicated floor moves.

BANDANAS: Seen on both coasts in the early '80s, but really took off on the West Coast as a means to signify gang affiliation. Usually worn around the head or wrist.

HEADWEAR: Why before Queen Latifah and Kangol knew new ground for product placement, there was a Kangol on nearly every B-boy's head. Baseball caps with the Playboy logo were cool for while, but breakers were more likely to wear backward or to the side. Sweatshirts with the hood pulled up à la Kenny in *South Park* were another option—a thick hoodie provided just the right padding for headspins.

CARDBOARD: Last but not least, if you were going to dance on the playground or city sidewalks, you had to have a choice piece of

smooth, thin cardboard—backspinning on concrete might snag your velour sweat suit.

THE MOVIES

WILD STYLES

(1992) Any lesson in B-boy culture begins with the John Alvin classic, which got the New York scene, which was resurrected by Rhinoc last year, breakin' scenes are interspersed throughout.

FLASHDANCE (1983) Surprise!—this dance flick introduced the world to large to more than just leg warmers and ripped sweatshirts. The Rock Steady Crew made a critical cameo, and at the film's climax, Jennifer Beals (actually Crazy Legs in a wig) breaks into a hiphop in the middle of an audition before a roomful of dou-ballet-school judges, melting their icy hearts.

BEST STREET (1984) A masterful look at the South Bronx/Manhattan scene, featuring the best talent from both the dance and nap worlds. The rivalry between the Rock Steady Crew and the Dynamic Rockers plays out in an incredible subway scene highly revered by breakdance cultures.

BREAKIN' (1984) Bordeleau-racist breakapalooza stinker—about a white girl give up the chase à la *Breakin'* so she can start dancing with the homeboyz—that stink West Coast (Hollywood/Venice Beach) homie still has some of the best popping footage ever recorded. Michael Chambers, a.k.a. Turbo, glides on like a swan as if it's wet glass.

BODYROCK (1984). Loranzo Laman stars as a ghetto street dancer. Enough said.



BREAKIN' 2: ELECTRIC BOOGALOO

(1984) Great title, bad movie: a shameless sequel in which even the dancing is lackluster, although Turbo shines again as both a personality and a poppet.

FOOTLOOSE (1984) At the end of this awful Kevin Bacon vehicle, a breakdancer who's completely devoid of rhythm seems to pop-lock and break-dance. Instantly, breakin' just didn't seem so cool anymore.

Note: The Bomb Web site (www.thehubin.com.au/~bom/bau/) features more than 30 underground breakdancing videos for sale.

Cheo Hodari Coker



(Left) vintage
Run-DMC hat; polo
shirt by Yves Saint
Laurent Pour Homme;
leather mesh jacket
and leather pants by
Costume National.
(Right) fedora
hat by Kangol; shirt by
Thierry Mugler; jeans
by Martin Margiela;
Wayfarer sunglasses
by Ray-Ban.

Where to Buy, page 133.
Fashion editor: Jill
Sivid; stylist: Jason
Farrer; makeup:
Carolina Gonzales;
hair: Guy-Laurent

Indie Movies—Now More

You can't swing a dead cat these days hyping, or making an **independent movie**. indie film won't end up killing itself

Suzanne Myers is tired. Tired of sitting for hours on and in a van with fellow artists who think petrified fast food makes for wacky dashboard art. Tired of sleeping on the couches and floors of friends once-removed. And, most of all, tired of talking about her ambitious first project, *Alchemy*, which she completed two years ago and has been trying to sell since. Myers, however, isn't in a band. She's a filmmaker.

After following the conventional route—making the festival circuit around the country and screening *Alchemy* (about a sculptor on the verge of a nervous breakdown) for studio execs—she conceived FUEL, a traveling film festival designed to give movies such as hers some kind of buzz. Myers, along with a small band of disenchanted directors, has spent the past few weeks hitting alternative venues around the country—wheel-pasting flyers at each stop, booking local bands to play at post-screening parties, and giving endless interviews to free weeklies in which she bemoans the lack of opportunity for young independent filmmakers.

Myers is just one of thousands of would-be indie stars who cannot seem to get a break at what is perceived as the fertile, blossoming garden of independent film. "India" is an inescapable buzzword these days, the definition of which is increasingly

fluid but generally includes some combination of the words "gritty," "real," "pure," "quirky," and, of course, "low-budget." In the past year, more films bearing that label have hit American screens than ever before in the history of cinema—and that may be nothing compared to 1998.

This January, at the indie-king-making Sundance Film Festival, studios arrived with films like Paramount's *The Real Blonde*, an ungently Hollywood movie in dire need of a little indie luster. Indie-juggernaut Miramax (now one of the five highest-grossing studios in the country) launched no less than five films at Sundance and snapped up several more during the festival. More than 600 members of the press made the scene, quadruple as many as in 1991. And for filmmakers trying to get in, ten times more movies were submitted than were accepted. Fortunately, the kids who get shut out of the studio-heavy Sundance have a panoply of festival options in Park City, Utah, each one claiming to be more indie than the next. Slamdance, a once-renegade festival (its promotional materials at one time sported the circle-A anarchy symbol) is now taken quite seriously by both the suits and the media; Slamdance spawned the smaller and ruder Sturmdance, which in turn birthed both the tiny Slamdunk and the mutant Undance, something closer to performance art than

an actual film festival.

Elsewhere, junior-varsity Hollywood players like Mario Van Peebles attempt to resurrect faltering careers by announcing plans to write and direct their own indies. Cable's Independent Film Channel airs formerly obscure films 24 hours a day, as does the Sundance Channel. The Independent Spirit Awards, once a no-frills, anti-Oscar brunch-on-the-beach ceremony, now gleefully issues press releases heralding Mercedes-Benz as a sponsor. Next month, the publisher of *Elle*, *George*, and *Swing* will launch a magazine called *Indie*. And the participants in FUEL, a bare-bones festival born of necessity, can be seen in glossy magazines posing in cross-promotional ads for Dockars. All of which poses the question: Whatever happened to independent film?

Back in the '80s, pods of young artists, steeped in the DIY aesthetic of their punk forbears, finance and produce their own material. Left alone, talent develops and, bit by bit, work gets more inventive and sophisticated. Then two shrewd businessmen with an eye on the scene carefully cultivate relationships with the kids and position their company as the sole entity able to funnel product to the masses while enabling wary artists to maintain cred. And then, finally, one well-timed release changes everything: It seems so overwhelmingly cool and

different and good that it resonates beyond its initial core audience and enters the mainstream. Everyone, quite understandably, wants more.

Smelling money, major companies buy stakes in upstarts or open "specialized" divisions. Inferior talent is massaged and manufactured in the likeness of its successful precursors. And all the while, the media relentlessly scavenges for the proverbial Next Big Thing.

But which scana is this, anyway—alternative rock or indie film? Green River and Mother Love Bone, or Jim Jarmusch and John Sayles? Sub Pop's Bruce Pavitt and Jonathan Poneman, or Miramax's Bob and Harvey Weinstein? *Nevermind* or *Pulp Fiction*? STP or *Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead*? Lollapalooza or FUEL? From beginning to end, they're freakishly similar scenarios, except for one significant detail—birds don't so much as pick at the carcass of Seattle anymore.

Indie rock is the ultimate analogy for what's happening in independent film," says Tom Bernard, the copresident of Sony Pictures Classics. "You have all these bands with all this hype, but the sales don't match the headlines. Independent film, like indie rock, is a niche. You can try and commercialize it and put it through the machine all you want, but it doesn't work. Yet Sundance is now a maccaw where economics are not even a consideration. It's like the way A&R guys scour

Than Ever!

without hitting someone discussing,
But Maureen Callahan wonders if
off. Just like alt-rock did



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"A lot of filmmakers who come out of L.A. make these Quentin-like movies—you know, gangsters, some guy with a gun, some chick, a bag of money, some blood somewhere. It's like, why?"

—Kevin Smith

disenfranchised white corporate males who simultaneously woo, dupe, and dump a deaf woman for kicks. *In the Company of Men* is, as Pierson puts it, "a signature film that keeps the old spirit alive." It's also a film that could never have been as brilliantly nasty had it not been made in a vacuum; LaBute shot it over three weeks in his native Indiana and financed it in part with an \$11,000 loan from a friend. The end result is a true independent that, in form and content, stands in opposition to the current standard: It's sophisticated, deliberate, unpredictable, and uncompromising. But most of all, it was unlike anything else in theaters at the time—something an independent film should, by design, strive to be.

Whereas ten or even five years ago all of those factors would've worked in LaBute's favor, they now conspired against him. Distributors feared the film could too easily be read as a misogynistic tract. It took two months of hand-wringing before Sony Pictures Classics finally picked it up. "There was a lot of debate about whether my movie was wonderful or useless," says LaBute.

His near miss is indicative of the state of independent film: While the perception is that audiences are hungrier than ever for something cinematically unique, confrontational movies like LaBute's just don't appeal to mainstream America.

Instead, it's trendy indie-esque movies such as *The Full Monty* and *Good Will Hunting*, which tend to follow time-worn Hollywood models, that draw large audiences. So while it's hardly surprising studios are searching out such innocuous TV-movie-of-the-week fare as *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Brothers McMullen*, and *If Lucy Fell*, they are spending a remarkable amount of money on small films that will never make a worthwhile return. Recently, October Films paid \$6 million for *The Apostle*, Robert Duvall's feel-good redemption fable about a fallen Pentecostal minister. "Six million for that?!" exclaims indie publicist Jeff Hill. "They're not gonna make it back. Really, how much are these people making when they spend \$10 million on a film and another \$10 million on P&A [prints and advertising]?" Hill believes—as do Bernard, Pierson, Hope, and Deutchman—that the hype swirling around independent cinema masks its shaky economic state. "These films are getting press all over the place," says Hill. "But they're not getting an audience."

In the wake of *Pulp Fiction*, Sundance has been inundated with close to 1,000 submissions annually. Of those, 50 are selected to screen in competition; of those, 30 find distribution. Of those, two, on the average, will make a healthy return; the rest lose money. According to the Studio System, a film/TV research database, 192 independent films were released in 1997, and a handful—such as *The Full Monty*, *Jackie Brown*, *Ulee's Gold*, *Eve's Bayou*, and *Mrs. Brown*—were profitable. The real American indie success story of 1997, we're told, was Kevin Smith's *Chasing Amy*, which received much adulatory press for both its aesthetic and fiscal value—it cost \$250,000 to make and grossed more than \$12 million domestically. On paper, *Chasing Amy* reads like irrefutable proof that American indie filmmaking is flourishing. In actuality, *Chasing Amy* is hardly as profitable as it may seem.

After Clerks—Smith—who admits his knowledge of how to make a film is rudimentary at best—found him self-funding offers from major studios. "It was so easy for me to make a movie then," says Smith. "There's an inherent danger in that, and the danger is something like *Malibu's*. A sophomore teen comedy that Smith spontaneously biassed as the second in his "New Jersey trilogy," *Malibu's* was made at Gramercy (considered a "mini-major" because it's owned by Universal) with a budget of \$6 million. It was eviscerated by the critics and promptly tanked. "Studies want

to get a piece of a person who has some indie success and capitalize on it," says LaBute, who is working on his next film, *Your Friends and Neighbors*, for Gramercy. "But these things are not math equations. In any good film, there is a groovy, magical spark at work. The studios take the thing that's unique about an independent director and his artistry, then box it and bastardize it."

Smith (who says he became "the indie whipping boy for a good, long period") returned to Miramax with a far less frivolous idea. *Chasing Amy* was everything *Malibu's* was not: a sharply written script comprised mainly of internal action and a thick-set self-analytical dialogue. Miramax offered Smith a \$2 million budget, with the proviso he cast David Schwimmer, Drew Barrymore, and Jon Stewart in the leads. "I didn't want that," Smith says adamantly. Wary of compromising himself yet again, he instead asked Miramax for \$250,000 in return for relative freedom, which he got. *Chasing Amy* opened to hails of critical praise and it instantly restored Smith's indie image, all the while generating a high return on Miramax's seemingly paltry investment. (The success of *Chasing Amy* has helped pave the way for the once-marginalized "gay" movie; this January, at least nine films featuring gay protagonists screened in Park City.)

But according to a source close to the production, all the backslapping over *Chasing Amy*'s profit margin is nothing more than creative math and the perpetuation of "the little indie that could" myth. *Chasing Amy* did cost \$250,000 to get in the can, but Miramax spent \$600,000 cleaning up the film in postproduction, and another \$8 million on P&A—not to mention the division of box office receipts. Miramax has made only a few million in North American box office—more or less breaking even.

So why do studios do it? For Miramax, it's shrewd business—Smith is one of their key players, as reliant on Miramax's maverick image as Miramax is on him. His next film, an Armageddon-themed comedy called *Dogma*, will be produced by the studio with a *Malibu's*-size budget. Plus, Miramax has Disney's financial muscle, so it can produce more films than it acquires and ultimately exert more control over the quality and quantity of its movies. And it can afford to take the occasional loss on a film with Oscar potential, which in turn heightens the studio's profile among potential audiences—who will now be more inclined to see a Miramax film when they're looking to see an indie. It's brand name recognition in the Sub Pop vein.

Still, independent film, like indie rock, appeals to a only a fraction of the total audience. The bulk of Miramax's revenue comes not from highbrow stuff like *The English Patient* but from more mass-appeal fare like *Phantoms and Screams*. Made for \$15 million under their Dimension banner, *Scream* grossed more than \$200 million in worldwide box office; the sequel has done \$100 million to date, and Miramax plans at least one more. Plus, the studio recently bought the rights to the sequels to indie antipodes *Rambo* and *Total Recall*. "It's clear that Miramax is going through that evolution of no longer being a specialized business," says Bernard. Good Machine's Hope believes Miramax is about to cede some indie turf, and once it does, smaller companies will be positioned to bolster real independent filmmaking.

Aside from the mini-majors, there are currently about 22 smaller distributors fighting for their scraps (eight of which opened shop in the past year alone). As in Seattle, these companies seem to pop up almost overnight. But the most telling development by far is the sudden involvement of captains of industry—most notably financier Carl Icahn. Despite knowing absolutely nothing about making or selling movies (he's, among other things, a board member of Colligan Water and the former CEO of TWIA), Icahn has invested \$50 million in Stratosphere Entertainment, which he proclaims will be, yes, the next Miramax.

"Anyone who believes film is a good way to make money needs to have their head examined," says John Sloss, a New York-based entertainment lawyer. Though Sloss says most potential investors "have heard it's a high-risk field," a confidence of factors drew them nonetheless. "Independent film has a very high profile in the average American's mind because of all the recent positive stories," he says. "And people want to get invited to premieres and parties. Couple that with a vast amount of disposable income due to the run-up in the stock market, and you can see why people would be interested."

"A lot of people have lost money investing in independent film," says producer's rep Pierson. "It's not a good business, but it's like they look at Miramax and figure they're printing money over there." But Miramax is a smart, aggressive company that runs on equal parts thrift and risk; as an independent film distributor, it's had unparalleled success. To the outsider, says Miramax's Harvey Weinstein, what Miramax does "looks easy and fun. It's not. The movie

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industry is littered with debris, and [Stratosphere] is next," Stoss agrees. "I think there will be a shakeout in the market," he says evenly. "These things tend to be pretty cyclical."

Still, given the current bullish market, it would seem there has never been a better time to be a filmmaker. But Hops, who has run Good Machine for seven years, says, "I've seen only a handful of films, in the entire time I've been in business, that I would've liked to have been involved with. And I get to see all the under \$1 million, self-financed films out there." Deutchman says that the lack of indie films isn't the issue. "There's just not enough good product out there," he laments.

It was in 1995 that America began to grow bored with alt-rock. Listeners started to consider music—which by then seemed everywhere—formulaic and uninspired. Though there was still good music being made, the audience had grown weary of hype, posing, and effectuation, and the major labels that had bought their way in began to bail.

Today, these same factors threaten independent film, but because of the buzz these films generate, studios continue to release shoddy, scrappy "indies," many of which mirror one another in look and echo one another in dialogue. FUEL founder Myers maintains that indie film, like alt-rock, has been soiled by its rapid mainstreaming. "The whole idea of FUEL is to show distributors that these movies are viable," she says. But the fact is, they're not. As Kevin Smith points out, you can't always divorce the financial realities from the creative ones. "People blame the guy for why their movies don't get picked up, but, you know, C'mon—can't you assume the respon-

sibility for why nobody wants to see the flicks?" he asks. "I'm a fan of *American Job* [one of the films on the FUEL tour], but it's not going to be enjoyed by millions," it plods.

Of course, less-than-stellar indie films have been around for decades. The difference now is that the filing frenzy for all things indie means that more films, regardless of how entertaining they are, find distribution—which in turn increases the number of indies getting produced. "You know, go to the Independent Feature Film Market in September or October or whenever they hold it," says Smith. "Get the book and look at the ell the features that get made, and then try to see whatever happened to five of them. These movies disappear. Now all these cats are looking at the FUEL people, going, 'Fuck! Why aren't they them?' And the FUEL people are looking at the people who get picked up by New Line and Miramax and going, 'Fuck! Why aren't they them?' It's such fucking ergorange—be happy you get any audience whatevs."

That piece of advice is as relevant to the struggling director as it is to the indie distributors, who must compete for a small audience that has grown skeptical not just of Hollywood blockbusters but of most films slapped with the indie label. Though Bernard is the first to admit the similarities between alt-rock and indie film are worrisome, he doesn't see the bottom falling out as long as investors and studios embrace its inherent fragility. "You have to massage this stuff and position it very carefully, because most of these independent films don't have the classic content that helps them last through the ages. It's a real of-the-moment thing," says Bernard. "Just like indie rock."



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THE PIRATE WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Save all that yo-ho-ho-and-a-bottle-of-rum stuff for the movies. A life of plunder, hijack, kidnap, and slaughter on the water isn't nearly as much fun as it sounds, as our man **Denis Johnson** found when he sailed the Sulu Sea in the Philippines and came face to face with the depressed and anxious pirate legend Rambo Barahama

Tonight on Basilan Island, the power is on for a change. The moths go berserk in the light. Striped wasps and small dragonflies coat the fluorescent tubes at the thatch-roofed Colegio Eatery Café.

Mating energetically, they drop down onto the plates. A skinny drunk in cut-offs dances alone in the back, his head lolling, his chin sunk to his bare chest. A slender two-foot bolo knife dangles from his waist. Around his neck hangs his *anting-anting*, a pebble tied with string. This charm makes him invulnerable to bullets.

The satellite TV plays images from one of HBO Asia's incredibly low-rent outdated B-minus movies, *Swashbuckler*. James Earl Jones, about to be hanged, is standing on a scaffold overlooking the very blue Caribbean. He's not sweating it; just before the trapdoor springs open beneath his feet, his own ship drifts silently into view around a promontory. His men touch off their cannon, blowing away boulders and coconuts and sending the dandy and hateable pirate hunter Beau Bridges flying, though he's able to hop up instantly, like a cartoon animal, blackened but functioning and ready to go after pirates again. And James Earl Jones skips off to continue buccaneering.

Here on the Sulu Sea, in the southern Philippines between Malaysia and Mindanao, pirates have operated since the advent of oceanic travel, but in the past decade this area has seen a kind of crazy renaissance of violent waterborne criminals. They remained nameless for the most part, but Jack

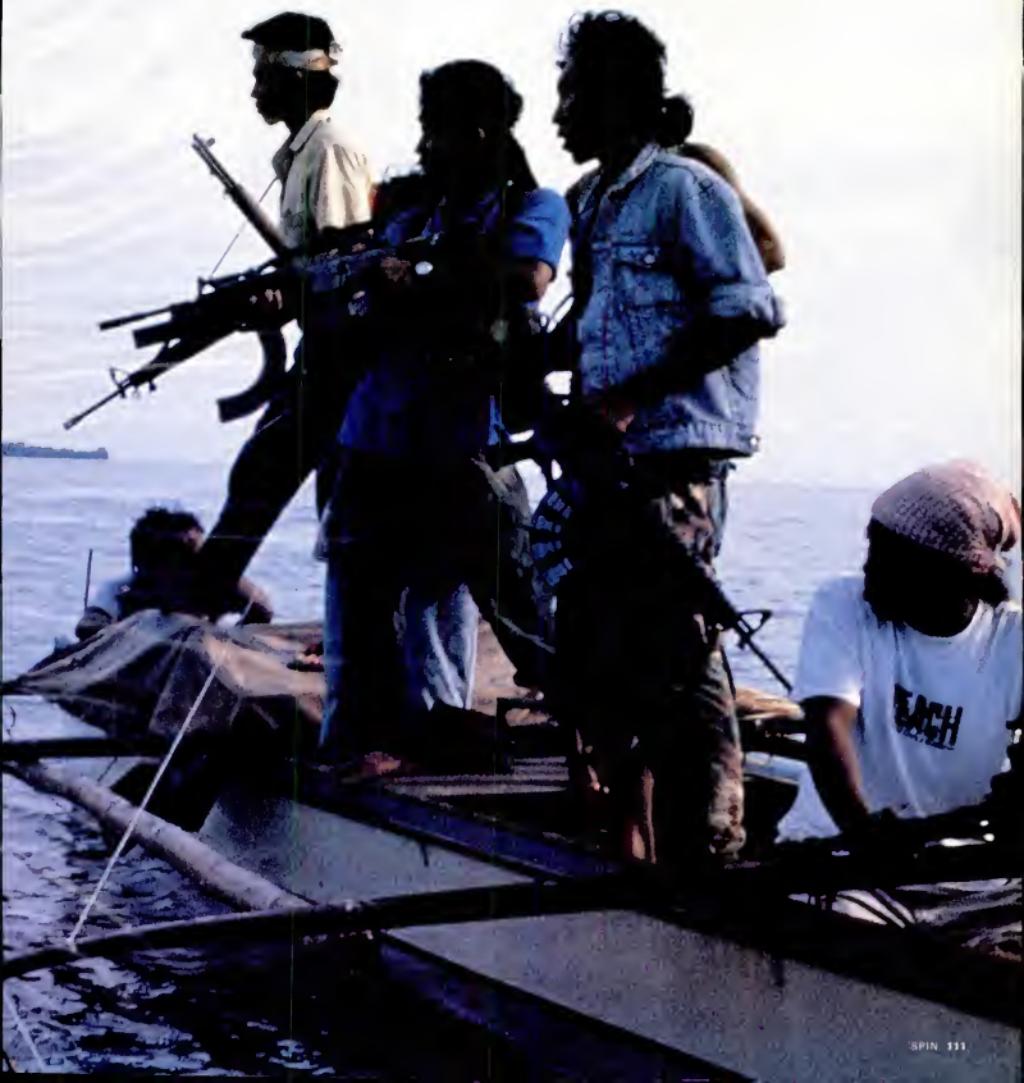
Salazar became notorious in the '70s and is still remembered, and so are the Changco brothers, Emilio and Cecilio, who seized freighters and tankers until they were captured a few years ago and jailed for life in Manila.

From 1983 to 1994, of the 1,065 "incidents" the Philippine government admits have taken place—attacks on cargo ships, fishing boats, private yachts, and passenger ferries—almost all occurred within striking distance of this island, Basilan. Its main habitation, Isabela, seems bodied directly out of *Indiana Jones*, a crowded town of plywood and bamboo shanties on the Sulu Sea, wavy corrugated roofs spilling down the hill and parway into the olive waters of the harbor. Seafaring, trade, and migration have made for a wild cultural mix, as motley as that of the Caribbean that spawned the buccaneers of the mid-1600s. But the mingling in the Philippine Islands started centuries before that (the Spanish arrived in the 1500s). It isn't generally appreciated that Ferdinand Magellan never made it around the world. His ship did, but Magellan himself was killed by natives 300 miles north of here.

The biggest structure downtown is the Cathedral Santa Isabela, filled with Catholics several times a week. Five times a day the muezzin calls the Muslims to prayer over loudspeakers. The people here look Chinese, Polynesian, even Arabic. From the time of the Spanish-American War until just after World War II, the Philippines was a territory of the United States. Ads and announcements

E. PASQUER/ROMA







Next time, take the train:

Previous page, the pirates of the southern Philippines trail the seas looking for victims; above left, some pirates actually get lucky; above right, a worried-looking fisherman who's learned to fight fire with firearms.

on the radio career dizzy through Spanish, English, and two or more Filipino dialects. You can speak just about anything and people get the drift, but real communication is hopeless in any single language and it's easy to get your signals crossed. You live in doubt as to what you've heard and what you might have said.

The Philippines is a hard country. Outside the cosmopolis of Manila and maybe the newly thriving city of Cebu, business stinks, the fishing's no good, and Marcos ruined the sugarcane industry with completely incomprehensible policies. There are coconut and mango, pineapple and seaweed to cultivate, but, by and large, survival itself is the game, a game everyone eventually loses. The trick is to lose it slowly rather than quickly. A gun makes all the difference here; the villages subsist under the control of various militaries—the Muslim separatist groups MNLF and MILF and Abu Sayyaf, the communist NPA, the right-wing CHDF, and jungle cults such as the Christian *Tad-tad*, whose name means "chop-chop," and refers to the fate of their enemies.

Secret-agent-type movies show them the way: the way of the AK-47 and the judo-chop, head-butts, body-slams. Live wrestling matches from Atlantic City or the strange joint Asian-U.S. film productions broadcast by HBO Asia or Indovision arrive in the bright floral tones of the TV screen—while all around, the real world looks sodden and grimy.

What's most striking to a traveler who hasn't visited the region in a decade is how space-based communications have altered the visual environment, spiking the jungle dark with moving *Blade Runner*-esque color images. You have to wonder how it's working on the people here, to witness the life around them, the rice being raked and husked on the basketball courts, the hundreds of motorbikes running on drops of gas over broken roads, the shanties of palm-hide and plywood, the hard-faced men bearing Armatiles in the jemmed market, coconut palms and tropical acacias and praying mantises and mosquitoes and black flies and naked children and dogs who

watch you eat—all the atmosphere of overcrowded subsistence poverty—end then the satellite-relied, lovely Taiwanese faces advertising breast-enhancing creams and unguents, the modulated stem Australian and American announcers talking about bond markets on CNN, the shopping arcades and hotel suites and bright carts full of sexy honeys exploding into these dirt-floored cafés where chickens scratch under the tables and ants make furrows in the mildew on the walls and the dishes available today—chicken, rice—line shelves in an unglossed cabinet and everything for sale is for sale in sample-size packets: shampoo, Nescafé, soap, powdered milk, one-liter Coke bottles full of pink gasoline, cigarettes sold singly, chewing gum by the stick.

But the ships go past Basilan Island toward Sandakan and Singapore bearing tons of sugar, copra, hemp; thousands of crates of 7 Up; packets of Charmin toilet paper; push-button calculators; frozen food. However the disparities may express themselves in the modern hour, one remedy for the locals remains unchanged: Go to sea a pirate.

Last year, near the port of Sirewaj in the Sulu Sea, seven pirates in camouflage gear hijacked a Filipino ferry, looted the 50 passengers of their belongings, shot three of them dead, and escaped in palm boats.

It's anybody's guess who did it. But the Filipino authorities would like to discuss the event with someone named Rambo Barahema, a Muslim pirate whose 28 years plundering the Sulu Sea has earned the \$100,000 price on his head.

Just before noon on February 26, 1996, according to the *Washington Post*, a crew of ten from the fishing vessel *Normina* was working in the waters of the southern Philippines. Two palm boats drew alongside and a pair of men in each boat opened fire with automatic weapons, killing nine of the unarmed crew. It took less than a minute, according to the lone survivor, a 50-year-old man named Janey Ajinohon who managed to get overboard and swim away, though he'd been shot in the back of the head. The *Normina* hasn't been seen since.

Nothing can be proven until he's caught, but the Philippine Coast Guard is convinced that Rambo Barahema—or "Ram" as he's generally known, or

"The High-Jecker" as he's believed to call himself—habitually perpetrates such atrocities.

From the High-Jecker participates in a tradition of considerable antiquity. From 700 A.D. to the early 1700s, Muslim pirates known as corsairs were active up and down North Africa's Barbary Coast. During the first quarter of 1997 there were 34 reported attacks at sea worldwide. Pirates boarded 24 vessels, took 105 hostages, killed six people, and wounded nine others on barges, ferries, freighters, luxury liners, fishing boats, and yachts—off Brazil, West Africa, China, Somalia, Greece. A year ago, four freighters disappeared off the coast of Libya—no wreckage, no crew to tell the tale—and the Economist suspects state-sponsored piracy. Pirates work the water everywhere—in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the China Sea, the Indian Ocean.

According to a couple of U.N. conventions, "piracy" consists of attacks mounted for private ends against vessels on the high seas. By this definition, very few pirates have ever violated international law, operating, as they generally do, not far from coastal enclaves.

The era is past when the British Royal Navy could cleanse the 13,000-plus islands that now comprise Indonesia simply by reducing pirate enclaves to blood and rubble with sea-based artillery. The upshot is the kind of bureaucratic hand-wringing that has ship "masters" failing to report incidents unless they involve the most serious losses or injuries. Victimized captains know port authorities will only hold them for fruitless investigations, which won't get their goods back.

And there may be a little more to these failures of authority. The darker voice in us may argue that the water belongs above all to the people who take to themselves the ungovernability of the sea, to those who not only sail but, by turning criminal, cut their ties to their lend-lying cousins—who must hunt them and be hunted by them.

In 1994, five squads of the Philippine Army mounted a nighttime ambush on the island of Litayan against a group of gunmen they believed included the pirate Rambo Barahema. Acting on a tip from one of the islanders, the 40 infantry caught the sleeping group in a crossfire, but when the shooting was over they recovered only two bodies. The other hijackers had escaped into the

Jesus, Piece Of You

(Atlantic) 00072

Shari Cross (Amer) 00072

R.E. M. 00072

8:15-5:45AM 00100

Toxic Lemon Parade

(Polydor) 00107

Television (Capitol) 00107

The Wallflowers: Bringing

Down The House

(Capitol) 10023

Talking Heads: Speaking In

Tongues (Sire) 01421

Warren Zevon

(Warren Zevon)

1 91429

Westlife: Greatest Hits

(Capitol) 01427

Cracker: Cattered

Reverb: Chronicle

20 Greatest Hits

(Capitol) 01429

The Band: Music From Big

Pond (Capitol) 01432

Bush: Bionic (Capitol)

Unterichts (Trotz) 21530

Suzanne & The

Barbary Coast: Once Upon A

Time...The Single (Capitol)

00273

John Denver & Yoko Ono:

Double Fantasy

(Capitol) 00335

The London Philharmonic

Orchestra: The Magic

Music Of The Year

(RCA Victor) 00485

Surfing With The Shakers

Surfastic (Capitol)

00485

Surfside 6: The Great Rock

Up! (Warren Bros.)

00485

The Beach Boys: Pet

Sounds (Capitol)

00485

Beat Of Dixie: Shakin'

Money For Nothing

(Warren Bros.)

00485

Edie Brickell & New

Sophomore: Headstrong

(Capitol) 00485

Five Iron Fury:

Dirt (Warren Bros.)

00485

Five, Dirty Mind

(Warren Bros.)

00485

Five Great Hits

(Warren Bros.)

00485

The Best Of Buffalo

Springfield: Remastered

(Capitol) 00485

Five: Dirty Mind

(Warren Bros.)

00485

Five: Greatest Hits

(Warren Bros.)

00485

The Alkaloholic: Litigation
Cost For August: \$1029
Grand World Don Wants
To Be A Rock Star (Warner
(Warner))

18818
Megadeth: Cryptic Writings
(Columbia) 18818

The Lady Of Rage:
Necessary Roughness
(Interscope) 18818

En Vogue: EV3
(Mercury) 18841

Mötley Crüe: Generation
Sex (Warner Bros.) 18845

The New York
(Epic) 18847

K-Ci & JoJo: Love Always
(Mercury) 18853

The Hives: Featurette (Sony
Rough Trade) 18863

Local Boy: Love, Peace &
Hope (Mercury) 18865

(Universal) 18865

Sugar Ray: Lullabies
(Mercury) 18864

Sarah McLachlan:
Surfacing (Mercury)
(Warner Bros.) 18862

Blue Thriller: Straight On
To Hell (A&M) 18867

Duff's Property From Kirk
Farrington's Heaven
(Warner Bros.)

Echo & The Bunnymen:
Eternal (Mercury) 18864

Herbie Hancock & Wayne
Shorter: Herbie &
+ 1 (Warner Bros.) 18865

Charlie Parker & Dizzy
Gillespie: Bird And Diz
(Mercury) 18866

Michael Peterson:
(Reprise) 18862

Depeche Mode:
The Covers
(Reprise) 18865

Lita McLean: Life
(Mercury) 18866

I.D. Gang: Drug
(Warner Bros.) 18868

Everytime Some
Tension (RCA) 18868

Usher: My Way
Way Of Life (Mercury)
(Warner Bros.) 18869

Matthew Sweet: Davis
e-Cat (Frassee) 112 (Mercury)
Evans, Lynne: The
Lynne (Mercury) 18847

Burytonics: Greatest Hits
2001 (Mercury) 18851

Kashmir: —In My Head
(Mercury) 18852

Clint Black:
Nothin' But The Truth
(Mercury) 18853

Rebelution:
Rebelution (Mercury)
Chopin, Louis: Chopin
Victor Best (Mercury)
(Warner Bros.) 18853

Lower League:
Things Up (Mercury)
Big Mountain: Free Up
(Mercury) 18847

Alice Cooper: A Flirt Of
Alice Love Has A Guest
(Mercury) 18848

Elvis Costello:
The Very Best Of The
Costello Collection (Mercury)
(Warner Bros.) 18847

Elvis Costello & The
Imperial March: The
Unseen (Mercury) 18848

Henry Manzini:
Martina With Martina
(Mercury) 18849

Elton John:
Greatest Jukebox Hits
(Mercury) 18850

John Denver:
Love Don't Live
Here Anymore (Mercury)
(Warner Bros.) 18850

Bobby Whelan:
Right (Mercury) 18851

Dream Theater: Falling In
Love (Mercury) 18851

Chumbawamba:
Chumbawamba, more... (Mercury)
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Lynne (Mercury) 20047

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2001 (Mercury) 18851

Shaggs: Groove Street
(Mercury) 20014

Steve Stone: Love And
Taste (Mercury) 20014

David Kraul: Love Scoundrels
(Mercury) 20027

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Punny Shit/crass comedy
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Space: The Blank
(Mercury) 21234

Eric Clapton: Love
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Eric Clapton: Love
Saves The Rucks (Mercury)<



(P)eti: All Eyes On Me
(Death Row)
Intercepto: 1+ 1991
Songstress: Blackout Time
For Hearing (New York)
A.M.E. 21437
The Roots: Radish (heltie)
(DG)

The Replacements: All
The Right Moves (Hurt)
All (Reprise) + 21164

The Replacements:
Please To Meet You
(Reprise) 21033

Pain in the Sky (Wim Stern)
The Best Of Emptys

(Reprise)

Take Me Out An Evening Of

Acoustic Music

(House Of Blues) C 21263

Mystical: Unpredictable

(Lilith) 21464

The Best Of The

Replacements (DG) 21273

Beck: Oddity (DG) 21411

Insane Clown Posse:

The Great Milenko

(Reprise) + 20961

Counting Crows:

Recovering The Satellites

(DG) 21412

Against Me!—Don Henley's

Goldmine Hits

(Geffen) 21415

Totally Madness—The Very

Bad: 21 Business

(Geffen) C 21218

Weezer: Pinkerton

(DG) 21425

Wang Chung:
Everybody's Hungry
Tonight...Greatest Hits

(Geffen) 21443

Lisa Loeb: Fingerprints

21444

Lisa Loeb & Nine Stories:

Tan (Geffen) 21445

The Muttish American

(Geffen) 21447

Steve 'n' Wonder: Song

Review—A Greatest Hits

Collection (Motown) 18252

JTC: Upset Queen

Recovering The Satellites

Or The Sweetest Hits

(Geffen) 21448

Midnight In The Garden Of

Good And Evil (Geffen)

Paul Brandt: Outlaw Tha

Paul: 21449

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Future Pirates Club:

Two scenes from life, on Basilean Island, hotbed of pirate activity due mainly to crushing poverty (not to mention all that water).

Sulu Sea. To the best of the Army's knowledge, Ram was not one of the corpses.

We tell stories of Captain Kidd or Bluebeard or the Chinese sea rogue Ching Yih—the pirate as aristocrat, as entrepreneur, as unchained proletarian sailor—but he has to be long-dead, and the mourners of his victims also dead, before his crimes become drama. What about the face and voice of a pirate whose story isn't finished—who hasn't been killed, who hasn't been caught—a living villain of the Sulu Sea hooked, somehow, with the name of an imaginary movie hero? What will Rambo Barahawa have to say for himself?

In the village of Sunisnap on Basilean Island, a Muslim group is at this very moment holding a German businessman, kidnapped last week in Mindanao, and if it's possible, the usual scrupulous caution and security-mindedness of the islanders has been enhanced. The military must be planning some sort of action. Spies must be about. Everything is a secret.

At the same time, the chairman of the rebel Islamic Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is a few miles across the water in Zamboanga City, conferring with the government about the terms of a truce.

They're all here—every Muslim bad man in the Eastern Sulu Sea is lurking in the sea of one or another of these islands, looking to get in on the amnesty being offered to the MNLF. Unless he's completely contemptuous of a chance to come out from under his massive bounty, Rambo the High-Jacker must be among them, and he must be communicating with someone.

Apparently Sonny Sueni is the person to speak with regarding this. Sonny runs a little store on Tepalen Island, just south of Basilean, a shack offering soft drinks, gasoline, fresh water, and sundries to almost nobody at all on a bit of land less than half the size of New York's Central Park. The loneliness of his environs is such that seagoing men wanting privacy or even absolute anonymity might do business with Sonny. In fact, he's rumored to be closely linked to pirates. And in the interest of security and caution, he won't talk with just any random journalistic foreigner who

turns up on Tepalen. He'll only meet in Zamboanga City, the region's metropolis some 60 miles north on Mindanao.

He enters a café off General Lim Avenue, late by a period of two hours, time spent, he says, "monitoring this location. I have been observing you." He is a dark man in a large T-shirt that covers his gunbelt, and ragged, perhaps stylishly ripped blue jeans. Above and below his left eye his face is scarred, and his voice is choked and froggy as if he's suffered some lasting injury to his throat.

A Beslan Islander by the name of Joe Allen, a newspaperman, publisher of a weekly bulletin, has agreed to translate.

Sonny admits he knows and communicates with "a pirate." Is this pirate Rem the High-Jacker? He won't say. But if the visitor is willing to be patient, a meeting might be arranged. There can be no camera or recording equipment, he says. The names of people may be written down, but not the locations.

Reaching the pirates involves a series of steps, as might seem natural to anybody whose death or capture would earn a large bounty, who isn't used to strangers, who has more enemies than friends; but these understandable reasons aside, nobody can intrigue like the islanders of the southern Philippines, with or without reason. Nobody.

The next morning, Joe conducts his visitor, now his most excellent companion, in one of Zamboanga City's at least ten thousand "tricycles": a Yamaha motorcycle with a covered sidecar whose oversize roof engulfs the driver too. They travel about eight miles out of the city until the pavement ends at a beachside barangay of shacks and cinder-block buildings called *Arena Blanca*, where they've been instructed by various anonymous messengers, going back and forth from here to somewhere over the course of many days, to wait at the barangay hall, which consists of four poles and a roof.

In the afternoon a fury boat on a bicycle stops with a message: They're directed to walk down through the shanties and find a pier where somebody wants to meet them. The boy disappears. They follow an alley full of black flies and fishy garbage to the pier and down a narrow, disintegrating bamboo boardwalk. Joe doesn't like this situation, he says, although his efforts alone have made it possible. He doesn't like this place, these people, this pier, this open white palm boat

pulling under the pier with Sonny and two other men standing in it. He doesn't like Sonny, dislikes the two silent men. He hates jumping down five feet into a drifting boat.

Sonny shakes their hands and, perhaps for the first time in his life, smiles. He gives a thumbs-up to somebody, could be anybody, and they're moving fast in the open 18-footer, out past a few junks and tugs and upward-jutting wrecks, around patches of cultivated seaweed pocked with white floats—old jugs, hunks of Styrofoam—and well out into the Sulu Sea among a multitude of small islands: hundreds of shades of green under slowly changing black and gray thunderheads, small vivid white beaches pattered into the view.

Ninety minutes later, Joe and the visitor are dropped off on a long beach on an island whose name—as Sonny informs the visitors as he sells rapidly away—they cannot be told. Sonny has received new instructions, to proceed, unaccompanied by foreigners, to the next rendezvous. The visitors' instructions are to wait. They wait looking out to sea and wondering if they've been kidnapped, as they've been repeatedly and confidently informed they would be.

Joe speaks with a couple of men mending nets beneath a thatch-shade. They don't know how big their island is. There's an elementary school somewhere on it, and supposedly better than a thousand people living here. Most of them cultivate seaweed.

Others come around. A woman gives them *darai*—brown sugar and coconut rolled up in rubber crepes. And *Coco-Cola*. No charge. A very small boy stumps past bleeding from the head end bawling; it seems his cousin has assaulted him with a rock. The visitors get all the attention, intense but politely veiled. People seem to be asking if they're seaweed buyers—asking one another, not the visitors themselves.

Two hours have passed.

The boat, the *Myra*, is nowhere in sight.

The huts on the island are constructed of frayed and eaten wood, driftwood, plywood, a little rough-cut lumber, all with thatch roofs overlooked by dangerously laden coconut palms. From among these dwellings, from behind the backs of the visitors, where they haven't been watching, Sonny suddenly emerges with another man, a guy in camouflage pants and jogging shoes, and a blue T-shirt and a black fisherman's vest of the



An ancient craft:

Left, a pirate on point; right, lining up for a ferry, always a risky proposition.

type favored by photojournalists.

"They've been watching us for a long time," Joe says.

The man's clothes look new. He has a thick black mustache, thick black hair, and dark skin—a tall, big-boned, quite distinguished-looking man, but giving an impression of shyness, even diffidence, and, when he gets closer to shake hands he seems burdened with a melancholy embarrassment.

Sonny says, "This is Ram."

Joe says, "I'm concerned about our situation."

Ram begins by telling them a bit about the island and about seaweed cultivation. He says the seaweed's harvested every month and sold, chiefly to Japan, to be used in plastic. He points at the stuff spread to dry on old fishnets—purple, cream-colored, and olive-green tangles. They dry it a day and a night, haul each end of the net toward the center to bunch it there, wait for the buyers from Zambo City. He speaks in an extremely soft and quiet voice, a handsome man with big feminine eyes. He gestures very carefully with his hands.

"If you're legitimate at all," he says, "this is about it, this seaweed. The fishing's not that great, just subsistence fishing mostly."

Sonny translates, and Joe corrects his English. Ram says the Tausug people get nine pesos for a kilo, dried. In Arena Blanco you pay eight pesos for a 12-ounce Coke.

Joe translates the first question: "Where are the other High-Jackers?"

The sun burns forth a minute in a kind of ember newness and among the shadows thrown by coconut palms appear three that might belong to people, to parts of people, to men standing behind the trees hidden from view but not from the sun. Nothing Rembo does would indicate he's even aware of this mysterious brief transmutation, but he manages to seem responsible for it.

"They have made a perimeter," Joe says.

Sonny invites the group into a little theater of sorts behind the first fringe of huts, a one-room tin-roofed building with the scrounged crudity of a set from *Mad Max*, with driftwood bleachers, up front a TV and VCR on a bamboo table, four wooden chairs around a cardboard box holding a pitcher

of water and two glasses.

Sonny sits with his knees wide apart, takes a long drink, juts his chest. "What do you want to ask? He is here to answer everything."

The two visitors take their seats facing Ram. Ram the High-Jacker. His blue T-shirt reads: **POLO PLAYER/NEW STYLE IN TODAY'S GENERATION.**

"How did they live before they were pirates? How did it start? What do you do, what have you done, what crimes have you committed, what atrocities? What about family, what about friends—how much is possible for a person committed, or condemned, to such a life?"

The questions come more slowly than that, maybe not any more artfully, but the conversation takes several hours. Ram the High-Jacker makes no attempt at English. Joe translates, checking now and then with Sonny, comparing notes in Sonny's dialect before they agree on what's been said.

"I am 41 years old," says Ram the High-Jacker. "Since I was 13, I've been a pirate."

"I started as a fisher and seaweed grower but, as a matter of fact, pirates made it difficult." He smiles, showing good white teeth. "Not only the pirates like Jack Salazar, but even the government, the Philippine Coast Guard, demanded bribes and protection money. This Christian government wages war against all Muslims."

He makes a weary gesture toward his own face with his open palm that somehow conveys the notion he understands the pointlessness of trying to defend himself, and says he considers his lifestyle a form of "retaliation," though he concedes it's purely private.

"We started in the '70s, when we were boys in our early teens, a dozen of us. We grabbed weapons from military men on commercial palm boats. We looked for a soldier travelling alone and ganged up on this single passenger, four or five of us boys, and stole his gun. When we had a dozen guns, we felt ready."

"We robbed both buses and palm boats at first. The buses yielded better cash, but palm boats were easier because once we were done we could take the boat and go. We keep a dozen palm boats, all stolen, which make up our fleet. We've always had between 12 and 15 in the group."

"The big barge, one of our biggest ever, was the *MS Ludes* cargo full of copra. We seized it, but nobody hurt the crew until Jack Salezar tried to board with his men a few hours later. Some of the

crew were killed, and several of Salezar's party. Those were the first killings. Yes, including Salazar himself. Yes, we killed Jack Salazar."

The latest operation?

"A barge of Coca-Cola was the latest operation."

And what about the *Normina*? A fishing boat, nine people dead?

"I don't know about the *Normina*. I don't know the names of boats, because I don't know my letters. I went to the first three grades at an island school, but I've forgotten how to read."

Ram the High-Jacker says that yes, he feels and appreciates the glamour of piracy. His life has made of him something unique—a man with a price on his head of 100 grand U.S., a kidnapper, a hijacker on sea and land, and the murderer of women and children, with no credible claim to revolution, no populist struggle to justify him. It's been his strength to live without all those words.

But now, to the extent that he has an agenda for this interview, it appears to be centered on a project for changing exactly that, his lack of a political rationale. He and his group wish to be viewed as connected to the Muslim revolt. The term they use for themselves, as Joe translates it: "the Lost Command."

Ram the High-Jacker nods and agrees in the only English words he will use all that day and night: "the Lost Command."

The Lost Command will lay down their arms to the "Chairman" Nur Miswan, the Muslim leader at the moment negotiating a settlement with the Philippine government.

"To the Chairman, only to the Chairman." Ram repeats, and they expect to be paid for their firearms, quite a large arsenal worth tens of thousands of U.S. dollars. They'll use the money as start-up capital for a legitimate import-export business.

To the visitor this sounds, in all candor, a little insane. But he makes no comment, because in the Third World such things are entirely possible when the winds of political change start blowing.

"I saw the burning of Jolo in the '70s," Ram says. "From my island I saw the light from the fire. The army burned the city down, an entire city. The fire still stops there, but there's nothing left of it but shocks."

The day has gone. Outside, women broil fish on charcoal fires beside the hooches, in the sand. Before it's impossible to see any longer, the foreigner moves close and studies the face of Ram the High-Jacker, leader of the Lost Command,



See Manila and die:

Left, a ship full of Italian tourists boarded by pirates, who bound their victims and robbed them, but let them live. (Not all pirate prey are so lucky.) right, The main work of pirates is in the watching and the waiting.

looking for something of the future, something of greatness. Seeking the kernel of tomorrow's pirate legend who'll be elaborated, codified, fictionalized—particularly if he dies outside of prison—and even forgiven. But there's nothing of that future lighting his way tonight. He's just a guy who started something a long time ago that he would very much like to finish.

So what is the term to apply now—guerrilla, revolutionary, commander?

Ram says it's too late to change things. The native speakers discuss it among themselves and agree on the authorized English spelling: "High-Jacker."

In a hooch nearby, the four take supper, served by a silent woman nobody introduces. Fish, rice, bananas. They take their shoes off first. A small generator makes electric light. Ram relaxes now, and says last year the High-Jackers got a passenger boat between Gagayen and Javitwan islands.

And were three people killed?

It's not clear at first that Ram has changed.

"I've never been caught," he says, "but sometimes it's close. This is my only wound"—he holds up his right hand, missing the tip of its trigger-finger, shot off by the Army, he says, in 1993, "the last time they almost got us. We were set up by somebody on the island of Litayan. They killed two of us, but the other four managed to hide until one of the villagers helped us escape. The loss put us down to ten in the group, but now we're 15. Five sons of the two who died recently joined us. Now we're in the second generation. Most of us are in our 40s. The new guys are in their late teens.

"I managed to get a third-grade education,

None of the others got any farther."

This thought seems to put him into sadness and he announces that after 28 years, more than half a lifetime as a pirate, he's "still poor, nothing's changed"—the overhead, the gasoline and maintenance for the boats, and everything gets split 15 ways, with a dozen families to support. Ram himself has a couple of wives and three children.

He was given the name "Rambo" by the Imam, the Muslim leader, on his island—it means "rat" in his island's dialect and has nothing to do with Sylvester Stallone or any of that.

"And I'm as poor as a rat," he says.

As for kidnapping: They've done one every couple of years, four big ones. But they've had bad luck on the land. A while back they worked hard setting up the snatching of a small boy from a rich family. But at the very moment they went for him, the lights went out—a power blackout—and they somehow got the wrong kid—not rich, but poor. So they sold him to a childless couple in central Mindanao for 5,000 pesos, which would have been around 200 U.S. dollars at the time.

Once for 20 days they shadowed a rich and beautiful woman to kidnap. This was in Pagadayan City. "We were misinformed at the crucial moment," he says. "We broke into her home and found only the maid. For her we only got 10,000."

As his descriptions of failure go on, growing aimless and somehow pleasant, it becomes apparent that Ram and his men have never actually stolen one of the large vessels, never commanded one and set the crew adrift.

Wouldn't such a ship be worth a lot of money? "Yes, but what do with such a ship once you have it?"

He's never considered taking an entire ship over to the China coast to sell it in one of the many ports where such transactions are said to be possible. He hasn't even heard of "phantom ships"—freighters stolen, repainted, and used for a while by the pirates, who take on fresh cargo and disappear into the lawless Chinese ports.

"These things are difficult," he says.

Difficult? Why?

"Because we don't have a leader."

In the total silence that follows this statement, something seems implicit, and it gives the foreigner a heady thrill, the feeling that he is face-to-face with utter madness in the form of an impossible opportunity. Suppose a foreigner went off a pirate...

And never came back. Turned his education to making crime pay. What couldn't you do with 15 killers at your command?

But then the foreigner plunges away from this thought by saying to those watching him, "These bananas are good" and "I like this fish very much...."

The pirate then looks out the doorless doorway at the dark and seems satisfied, having eaten, and maybe a little bored. It's become just another night for him on one of these hundreds of islands. Joe translates his next statement carefully: "If you don't know which port you're sailing to, no wind is favorable."

The foreigner thinks he recognizes this statement as one by the ancient Roman thinker, Seneca. He believes he heard it quoted, in fact, just the night before on the BBC, in English.

Now Joe says, "He wants you to know: 'Who we are, and what's happened, we still have faith in God.'"

After dinner Rambo asks for the foreigner's hat—an Australian type, with a brim that snaps—and there's no way in hell the foreigner would refuse. It's dark and they're about to get into a palm boat with Rambo the High-Jacker and go wherever he and Sonny take them, supposedly back to Arena Blanco. Yes, the hat's his.

Before they leave, Rambo steps away into the darkness. Joe says, "He will advise his men as to their orders."

Halfway across the dark sea to Arena Blanco, the boat's engine cuts out. The sky is clear overhead, the breeze is small, and the water is quiet. By the light of the stars, the Milky Way, Sonny reaches into his fancy pack and produces, at this moment, a .38 revolver. "You see?"

"I see."

"We have our guns."

"I see."

The foreigner is reminded of a couple of dreams he's had in which he actually dies. He thinks: I hope he shoots Joe first.

But Sonny puts the gun away. After a while the engine starts up—they've fixed the fuel line—and they're moving again.

It's not quite midnight when they tie to the pier at Arena Blanco. Too late for commercial traffic, but with any luck they'll find a driver asleep on the tarmac next to his tricycle and get him moving with a bribe.

Ram the High-Jacker walks the visitors to the foot of the pier, and there says good-bye, be well, and goes no farther. In 20 years he hasn't set foot inside a town without his men, he says, and even then only long enough to plunder, hijack, kidnap, slaughter—"to do the work life gave us." ■

The Professional Lesbian

As the head cop at GLAAD, it's **Chastity Bono**'s job to make sure gays are portrayed fairly in movies and TV. Though she's fought with everyone from studio heads to her late father, **Erik Himmelbach** discovers Hollywood's chilled-out queer conscience knows when it's cool to call someone a fag

Photographs by Chris Buck



Fred and Margie Phelps blew their Social Security checks on the trip to Palm Springs. But the 68-year-old pastor of Topeka, Kansas's Westboro Baptist Church hasn't come to grieve for Sonny Bono, who had died four days earlier in a skiing accident. Instead, Phelps and his wife are standing on a corner a half block from the frenzy in front of St. Theresa Catholic Church, where swarms of media and thousands of onlookers are gathered, hoping to get inside. Ignored by the surreal parade of Che look-alikes, Republican dignitaries, blue-haired locals, Hog-riding bikers, Hollywood suits, and flag-attired clowns who have arrived to pay their respects, the Phelpses brave the threatening clouds and wave signs bearing the image of Sonny's only daughter that read GOD HATES FAGS and DYKE BONO. According to Phelps, Chastity Bono is a "satanic evangelist for GLAAD."

It's true, part of it anyway: Chastity Bono does work for GLAAD. As the entertainment media director for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, she's become the gay conscience of the entertainment industry, keeping a watchful eye

himself. I've always stuck to my beliefs. He's the one who's compromised his beliefs and his family for the sake of politics. Those are his demons." Though Sonny Bono, the father, applauded his daughter's decision to come out of the closet, Sonny Bono, the U.S. Representative, voted in favor of the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as "only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife." Chastity took it personally. (After his death, Chastity is, naturally, more forgiving. "How stupid is it," she says quietly, "to let a space develop in a relationship over politics?")

When Chastity came out in the *Advocates* in 1995, five years after being outed in the tabloid *Star*, Dad was right there. "You could recognize something was different, but I didn't say anything until she wanted to let me in on it," Sonny told me a month before he died. "I wanted her to come out before she came out. To carry that as a secret is a tremendous burden." Though he was supportive, it was Cher—liberated, outspoken, played-a-lestian-in-Silkwood Cher—who freaked out.

"It was a scary time for the whole family

She talks in the hypercalm, measured tones of someone concerned she won't be taken seriously. It's an assured, assuring voice but as animated as watching paint dry. As a professional lesbian, such traits come in handy.

MPA President Valenti called a few months ago to ask her opinion about Sonny's Christmas comedy *As Good as It Gets*, after the MPA balked at the film's trailer in which grouchy novelist Jack Nicholson calls his gay artist neighbor Greg Kinnear a "fag."

The filmmakers had appealed the decision, and Bono was called. Was "fag" offensive? Not after she viewed Nicholson's character in context.

"When I saw the film, I saw that this character's bigoted and rude toward everybody," she says. "He calls Jews 'kikes' and Spanish people 'spics.' He's just extremely prejudiced across the board."

Shouting, showing anger, those are things they expect, Chastity explains. But the angry-gay-militant thing is six minutes ago, and bad for business besides. "You have to play the game to a degree. You can't just go in and scream and yell anymore," she says, gripping her pen in a sort of Bob Dole choke hold. "You have to look at things



on movie and TV content that may be potentially offensive to homosexuals. Primarily known for its vociferous protesting of such fare as *Sharon Stone's* laughable portrayal of a lesbian in *Basic Instinct*, GLAAD figured it was time to overhaul its image. Bono was hired a year and a half ago to damper the notoriously angry edge of the non-profit organization, and in the process, she's helped make gay-themed content more acceptable to the studios and networks.

Given the response from both industry insiders and homophobic conspiracy theorists such as the Phelpses, it would seem that Chastity Bono, post-p.c. professional lesbian, is pretty good at her job. "I respect her judgment," says Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti. "There's no bullshit with her."

Inside the ground-floor lobby of GLAAD's West Hollywood office, a preening glamour shot of gay patron saint Judy Garland stares you down with gauzy, amphetamine-tweaked eyes. Upstairs, the hallways are littered with gay-themed movie posters (*Mystic River*, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*). But queer kitsch is conspicuously absent from Bono's Spartan office, which is instead decorated with *X-Files* postcards, a few wild-haired trolls, and photos of her ex-girlfriend. Here, Bono works the phones, taking calls from concerned entertainment players, tracking down unconcerned others. Right now, however, she's talking about her father.

"He's a hypocrite," says Bono; it's six weeks before Sonny's death. "He's going to do what he's going to do and ultimately he's got to live with

because I didn't want to be out," Chastity says of early 1990, when a *Star* headline blared, CHER SHATTERED AS DAUGHTER CHASTITY TELLS HER: I'M GAY. "It put my mom in a difficult situation because everyone was asking her. She doesn't ever lie to the press."

Complicating the situation was a deal Chastity had recently signed with Geffen Records. "The fear was that it would affect my music career, which at the time was something I wanted," Chastity says. "I had just gotten signed and thought everything would be over before it would begin."

Her band, *Ceremony*, released just one album of innocuous, middle-of-the-road pop for Geffen '93 before being dropped from the label. Still, it's ironic that the label then-owned by gay godfather (and early post-Sonny paramour of Cher) David Geffen pressured her to stay in the closet. Deny, they said. So she did. But that couldn't prevent her from becoming a gay icon—Chastity T-shirts were sold at gay pride parades, and gay bars were wallpapered with her tabloid coverage.

In 1995, after her music career had fizzled and her partner died of cancer, Chastity came out in the *Advocates*. "It was a bad time in her life," says Judy Wieder, the *Advocates*' editor-in-chief, who conducted the interview with Bono. "She was pretty gun-shy about coming out, but being in the closet was miserable for her."

Finally, Chastity was no longer hiding, no longer merely the daughter of Sonny and Cher. "Up until the last few years, everything I did was in comparison to my parents," she admits. "Every question asked of me was about my parents. So I've tried to distance myself as far away from them as possible." She is as low-key as her folks were flamboyant.

Pro Bono: from left, Chastity as squeezable prop on *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour*; with suspiciously-like-named bandmember Chance in 1994; with then-Palm Springs mayor Sonny in 1992

as degrees of going forward and understanding."

This philosophy has allowed Chastity to make peace with former nemesis Steve Coz, editor of the *National Enquirer*. Coz, whose tabloid has given a not-insignificant amount of ink to the Bono family, says they now talk regularly. "She almost single-handedly evolved gay causes, approaching it in an intelligent, healthy fashion," says Coz.

"When someone grows up the way she grew up, you think they might become warped. Not Chastity. She's down-to-earth, in touch with America, like your next-door neighbor. She's the perfect person to instigate change in America."

As Sonny Bono is being laid to rest at the Desert Memorial Park amid 21-gun salutes and swirling white doves, Chastity Bono looks around at the thousands of people who share her grief. Her gaze eventually falls upon Nevin Gingrich, the funeral attendee whose politics and ideology are perhaps farthest from her own. Earlier, she had pleasant conversations with Gingrich and others in the Republican contingent, which included Pete Wilson, Jack Kemp, Gerald Ford, and Dan Quayle. They told her how similar she was to her dad—in mannerisms, in professional demeanor, in her innate ability to cut through the crap. She appreciated the compliment and smiled politely. To many of those present, it seemed clear that Chastity may have already become the most politic Bono of them all. ■

The Dog Ate My Hard Drive

While our nation's schools rush to go digital, Celebration, Disney's much-disputed community project, is already running the world's most wired high school. David Kushner plugs in to find out if high tech really means higher learning. Photographs by Chris Buck

The dream for the school of tomorrow opens on an old, familiar man from yesterday. Standing next an architect's sketch of a space-age city, Walt Disney, the late animator who gave us the world's most famous mouse, talks of building "a community that more people will talk about than anywhere else." At its heart will be an educational wonderland. As he fades, we cut to today, where happy residents in brightly lit living rooms extol the virtues of safe streets, good teachers, and high-speed cable modems.

This sales pitch loops a couple dozen times a day in the preview center at Celebration, the town Walt Disney Imagineering recently built near the Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida. Every day, herds of sun-pinked tourists wander in for a quick tour. What they get is the same type that's buzzing across the country: High-tech schools, like the one here, will

not only better equip students for the computer age, they'll make them smarter. Now, 30 years after Disney first imagined EPCOT (the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), a new team of dreamers is developing the model smart-school in Celebration's immaculate "burb."

Since its ribbon was cut two years ago, Celebration has received plenty of attention for the sheer kitsch value of 1,200 people living in a theme-park town. A more dynamic story, however, has been unfolding in Celebration's K-12 public school. While Celebration's homes hearken back to Norman Rockwell Americana—a product of New Urbanism's interest renewing "community"—its school is pure Jetsonian Utopia. Armed with a stockpile of techno gadgetry, students will soon perform virtual reality Shakespeare, collaborate with students in Malaysia, and analyze pond scum with electronic probes.

"Most schools still teach like it's the 1940s," says Larry Rosen, the evangelical education professor who helped plan Celebration's Teaching Academy. "Would you rather have doctors operating on you with modern equipment or with technology from the '40s?" As other schools scramble to boot up, Disney, with the backing of the local Osceola County and the Celebration Company, has pooled \$30 million to create the most wired campus on the planet.

When the video ends, the cameras-toting crowds disperse for their next destination: Sea World, Universal Studios, another fried lunch. A snowy-white couple in matching Goofy visors follows a guide upstairs to see a real estate agent. After the guide returns, I ask him why they want to live in Celebration. Is it the weather? The proximity to Disney World? Space Mountain?

"Nope," he says, blinding me with his smile. "It's the school."

This isn't the first time technology has been called upon to reinvent public education. Seventy years ago, Thomas Edison predicted movies would eliminate books from the classroom. Later, filmstrips and language labs were supposed to usher in a bold new era of learning. But to many educators, computers aren't just the latest toy, they're a necessity. New Jersey lawmakers, for instance, axed part of their state's school-aid budget to lay out \$10 million for PCs. A Boston-area school opted to spend nearly \$350,000 on digital gizmos instead of hiring art teachers. And although California schools are still reeling from years of budget cuts, the state has proposed \$11 billion for computerizing classrooms.

More programs such as these are on the way. President Clinton has mapped out a \$100 billion computer initiative, and has sanctioned a series of national "Net Days," during which



Outward bound: Celebration students take notes on their aMates during a biology fact finding mission.

parents and other volunteers help wire schools.

Teachers, for their part, rank computer knowledge as more important than biology, chemistry, and history. Proponents say the advantages are clear. Kids in Whitefish, Montana, will be able to comb King Tut's tomb from their desks. Biology students from Tampa and Taiwan will mingle online while they dissect fetal pigs with Smithsonian scientists. The days of mind-numbing drills and sleepy-time lectures will be over. Plus, high-school graduates will be primed to surf the increasingly digital workplace.

Certain issues get lost in all this technobabble. Technological literacy today means mastering basic tasks such as word processing, which is as easy as playing Tetris. And with no solid proof computers boost students' learning, the high cost of maintaining and upgrading a gaggle of laptops, scanners, and CD-ROMs may not be worth the payoff.

Undoubtedly, Celebration is going full-baud ahead. To hear Larry Rosen tell it, the school is all about "greater freedom" and "flexibility in learn-

ing. 900 students, a number of whom are from the surrounding county and entered a lottery to gain admission, skip through the building's Froot Loops-colored building and plug in.

"See that kid over there making a poster on the floor?" Muri says as we pass an art class strewn with Nirvana-patched backpacks. "We have software programs and printers that can make this kind of work! See those kids reading those books over there? They could be reading that on the Net or a CD-ROM! See that teacher looking at that student's work on a piece of paper? She'll be looking at it online!"

Soon, Muri says, Celebration will go paperless. That's right, no more textbooks. Already, students have access to an "electronic library" of millions of magazines and books, as well as a media retrieval system that can feed videos or laser discs right to their desktops. Kids can plug laptops to any of the 1,800 data ports socketed throughout the building. They can even get satellite TV.

It's all part of the school's motto, which Muri describes as "Anytime,

Computers create a fundamental shift in the student/teacher relationship. Students don't just think they're smarter than their teachers, they know it

ing." While no one is saying schools like Celebration's *shouldn't* go digital, some scholars think it's a question of degree. "Celebration is trying to create a model school all at once," says Larry Cuban, Stanford education professor and author of *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology Since 1920*. "There is a long history of efforts to try to do that, some of which have succeeded, but most of which have been derailed or failed."

If Celebration is Disney's educational fantasy, Scott Muri wears the wizard hat. A congenial Southerner with a fat caterpillar mustache, he was working as a science and math teacher in North Carolina when he was recruited to oversee Celebration's technology program. His official title is Instructional Technology Specialist. As he says, "I didn't want to be the fix-it guy."

Muri takes me on a brief campus tour, pointing out that Celebration is still in its Beta phase. The school, initially located in a temporary trailer, has recently moved into its permanent facility outside the town square.

anyplace." To milk the intranet that connects the school to the community, Celebration is creating "electronic portfolios," which will be digital capsules of each student's work. If, while withdrawing cash at an ATM on Main Street, e-sophomore suddenly remembers the answer to a homework question on the Hundreds Years' Web he can simply run over to the bank's computer kiosk, call up the file, and punch it in. The thought of doing Western Civ at the Gap is creepy enough, but parents can also use the portfolios to keep tabs on Junior's progress. In the old days, a student could tell Mom and Dad the dog ate the report card. At Celebration, Rover will have to eat the hard drive.

As we enter an elementary classroom, where a teacher scurries between kids in various states of spontaneous combustion, I can't help but wonder about the mundane realities that underlie Celebration's vision quest. For the school to become paperless, someone will have to individually scan all the been collages, algebra quizzes, and hand-

written *The Catcher in the Rye* book reports into the network. Who's going to have time to do this? Muri points to a six-year-old boy in the corner who's struggling to scrawl his name on a wide-ruled sheet of paper. "Him," he says.

The kids don't have much choice if the teachers don't know how to use the machines. I head into the frenetic junior-high section of Upper 3, a Celebration neighborhood that groups kids of different ages into one sprawling class. Teacher Jackie Flanigan looks excited but distraught. Her class is about to boot up for a distance-learning program, a crown jewel of high-tech education that aims to connect students who would otherwise never meet. Clusters of giddy Celebrationers are huddled around blinking computers, chatting with Indiana farm kids. The assignment is ambitious: to compare cultures and discuss the concept of civilization. For now, though, the topics are more Saturday afternoon on AOL: skating, a cute chick named Mandy, and Pride, Celebration's new mascot, which, according to two gum-snapping girls, looks like a way-lame mutation of the Lion King with wings.

While the kids gossip and high-five, a freckled girl calls out, "Mrs. Flanigan! Someone's deleting my files!" Mrs. Flanigan emits a volcanic sigh. Clearly, it's enough of a challenge to keep 30 electrified teens on task, let alone save them from getting their data hacked. "I'm not prepared," she tells me in her Holly Hunter drawl. "There aren't many people who are, unless

Autostimulation: students parked outside a Celebration-sanctioned Neighborhood Electric Vehicle

you're Bill Gates."

Flanigan isn't alone. According to a recent study, only 15 percent of teachers have had more than nine hours of training in educational technology; 18 states (including Florida) don't even require training for a teacher to be certified. The result is a nation full of Jackie Flanigans: thoughtful, dedicated, overworked teachers who don't get the support they need to exploit the pricey tech schools are bankrolling.

So when the girl panics, it's not Mrs. Flanigan to the rescue; it's a student like Louis Grasso—one of the self-taught techie kids who keep Celebration's computers running. A 17-year-old with an enviable collection of Metallica T-shirts, Louis likes to hack around: he wants a career in computer security systems. There's only one problem. "I barely get my school-work done," he says, "because I'm always fixing computers."

What students like Louis might be losing in class time, they're gaining in status. Introducing computers to a school creates a fundamental shift in the student/teacher relationship. Students don't just *think* they're smarter than their teachers, they *know* it. For administrators, the big concern is how kids will use their new power. Most schools and corporations engage in some form of online monitoring. Because so much of Celebration exists online, they've had to take monitoring—eavesdropping, basically—to a unique next step, one Muri affectionately calls "network discipline."

One afternoon, a 15-year-old bleeder named Steven Kaczmarczyk made



Drowning in tech:
Steven Kaczmarczyk
plays keep away with
Louis Grasso's keyboard.

the mistake of trash-talking online in the student chat room. "I basically called one of my friends an asshole," Steven says. "Then I insulted his mother." The next day, he was paid a visit by Muri, who waved a printout of the chat-room discussion at Steven and reminded him he could be expelled. Instead, Steven received a more 21st century punishment: He had his computer access suspended. Of course, when Celebration bans a kid's access, it's essentially banning him from the library, the classes, and his homework.

For Steven, whom Flanigan considers one of her brightest students, there's a not-so-subtle subtext to Celebration's dictum of freedom through technology. "We're paranoid whenever we go on those computers," he says. "It's like someone's always watching you."

There are some things a computer can't replicate, like fresh air. I trail along with a science class heading off into the woods a few hundred yards from

campus. Snow egrets cut through the sky. This is Florida at its most serene. Deep in the palms, something starts beeping.

At first, Mr. Braley, the group's teacher, doesn't hear a thing. "All right," he says, enthusiastically gutting a plant from the dead brown fronds. "Can anyone identify this? Anyone?"

A biggy-jeansed dude says, "Uh, weeds?" But that's the only response. The seven other students are anxiously trying to find the source of the incongruous electronic beeps, which, they suspect, are coming from their iMates: green-shelled, GI Joe-style laptops they brought to take notes on. So far, most of them have been pounding away on their keyboards. Mr. Braley tells me they'd never take so much down if they were using paper and pens. "Maybe it's just the coolness of it," he says.

At this moment, someone seems to be using them for a more recreational purpose. "Yo, check it out," shouts a guy in a Fila shirt and zebra-

striped shorts. "It says someone's 'beaming' me! How are they doing that?"

"There's, like, an infrared thingie back here," Louis the hacker explains, "and that, like, beams your notes and shit to whoever else is around." Mr. Braley steps over and asks what's going on.

"Everyone's beaming each other," a pale girl says.

"All right, class," Mr. Braley snaps, "no more beaming!"

The students clamp shut their iMates, then complain about the bugs. There's a bad virus of encephalitis going around, a pretty blond says, and if she gets bit by a mosquito, her brain will swell up until she dies. Mr. Braley says they'll head back as soon as someone IDs the clump of vegetation. He hands it to Louis, who, after a few hapless yanks, just shrugs. He doesn't know the

answer, and, in Celebration's big scheme, he doesn't really have to. Here, it's more important for kids to be up on what's inside their hard drive than what's outside their window.

Finally, Mr. Braley offers a few hints: The plant is nicknamed for how it feels; it's the same name of the stuff that connects the school and the town; it's something you should be familiar with, Louis. It's called wire.

The next day I polish off a few soggy grilled-cheese sandwiches in the cafeteria, then follow a couple of kids over to the library, or as it's now called, "the media center." Before it was constructed, Paul Kraft, Celebration's information technology specialist, formerly known as librarian, had high hopes: "I envision the walls eventually covered with stimulating material of educational value and kid appeal," he said. "Kind of like in a Hard Rock Cafe or Planet Hollywood."

When I arrive, alas, there are no Keith Moon drumsticks on the wall.

In fact, it looks like an ordinary school library with one exception: I don't see any books, just a couple dozen computers clustered in the middle of the room, which resembles NASA mission control. A chubby Indian boy starts demoing his latest Web site for me. "It's kind of boring right now," he says, as his name sparkles across the screen, "but I'm working on some cool Java applets that should make it rock."

What doesn't seem to be rocking are the rows of books stacked rather forlornly in the back shadows. The aisles are empty of kids and, according to Kraft, that's how they usually remain. When I ask a couple of students at the computers if they ever consider researching offline, they crack up. "Only when the computers are down," says a skinny 15-year-old boy. The girl next to him agrees: "Yeah, information is definitely better online." With wide eyes, she tells me how she just found an entire Web site devoted to her next research topic: the history of volleyball.

"What if you had to do a report on, say, James Joyce?" I ask. "Is that spelled with an 'i' or a 'y'?" the boy asks, as he works his mouse with the precision of a Japanese chef. "Yahoo doesn't spell-check." With a few clicks, he finds a Joyce Web site and, after a quick glance to make sure it has enough text, saves it to his disc. Done deal. I wonder, though, where this info comes from. The boys say he never really checks. When we click the link at the bottom, does it lead to Prince-ton? Yale? No, it's Ron's *Toga Party*—a site with a photo collage of Elvis, Santa Claus, and a tongue-wagging drunk who, I presume, is Ron. It seems Ron has a penchant for frat-boy antics, and of course, Irish modemists.

I have a good laugh with the kids, but would their parents? I ask the boy his name.

"Rosen," he says. "Is your father Larry, the one who helped set up the school?"

"Yep." And it turns out the girl is the daughter of Jackie Flanigan, the distance-learning teacher. I feel like I need to reboot. If the bigwigs' kids can't tell James Joyce from Carrot Top, who can? But Celebration isn't about thoughtfulness, it's about speed—the speed to get information, to get schools wired, kids connected, a proverbial bridge to the 21st century. What happens after that seems almost beside the point. "Hey," I say to Flanigan, "so why do you think this information is better online, anyway?"

"Because," she says, like I'm being really silly, "it's quicker." ■



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Mama Said Knock You Out

Two rap dynasties—Wu-Tang Clan and Bad Boy—battle for supremacy

8 Killah Priest
Heavy Mental (Geffen)

vs.

1 The Lox

Money, Power & Respect (Bad Boy)

A hip-hop cage match! In one corner, Killah Priest, the latest Wu disciple, a man who has guested with GZA, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and even Jon Spencer, but who has never nuzzled Mariel. In the other, the Lox, Puff Nephews already heard on Biggie's album, Puffy's "Benjamins," and Mase's "24 Hrs. to Live." Priest is a true-blue Wu, building rhymes from sentence fragments and beats that are as much digital noise as rhythm. And the Lox practice Puffy's philosophy of clear (if not narrative) rhymes and beats that fill up the sound range boominly.

So is this the Bible versus Babylon, artists versus salesmen? Not for this listener, at least. As much as I love the Wu's gnarled texts, I have an equally large soft spot for Puffy's vision of hip-hop as capital-letter entertainment. Hedonistic rhymes tied to familiar tunes and easy-to-read beats improved a summer of '97 spent driving a busted Honda. But questionable pleasures (Mase, Spice Girls, Twinkies) demand a contract between the sucker and the sucker. "You know this is bad for you but I'm not so bad, really, so you don't feel bad while being bad." When Biggie starts rapping, our pleasure watching him do the unwhole-some thing is premised on his ability to disarm our disapproval with skill, charm, presence. The Lox have no such hoodie, more hecks with backing than urban grits. So, unless Priest goes for Puffy's ear, the amped avant-gardist will take home the belt.

The Wu get their beats up fast and start rhyming, a guerrilla methodology that yields the most from expensive studio time. With records made this way, the proof is in the players and how captivating they can be without real song structures. *Heavy Mental* is pretty captivating, although anyone looking for cohesion will find it messy, self-contradictory, and long. Killah Priest's jump-cut preaching eddies Book of Revelation bluster end astronout day-dreams to the Wu view, more consistently metaphysical than Ghostface's blunt confessions but still in line with the Wu belief that black soul is more interesting than black violence. Priest likes free-floating theories and vivid imagery: "If You Don't Know" declares "Religious worship is worthless" and pictures Reagan, Bush, and Clinton barefoot and sucking from the titiess of a wolf. More thoughtful than "It's all About the Benjamins," for sure, but after an hour of encrypted epiphanies,



Killah Priest: when Wu were kings.



The Lox: Bad Boys bow down before the Wu's superior technique.

I'm thirsty for a few referents as specific as KRS-One's, or even Tupac's.

"Cross My Heart" is an exciting three-way rhyme with Priest, GZA, and Inspectah Deck; "If You Don't Know" features an Ol' Dirty Bastard chorus that, even for Cyrus, is especially deft funk; and "Atoms to Adam" features an unexpected and beautiful vocal chorus. "Heavy Mental," though, is the knockout. While a beatless pot of didgeridoo boobs, Priest hallucinates a mission statement: "Between the eye sockets is where I will build my rockets / I broke the U.S. barcode / Only to glow with a holy robe." Then someone begs him to turn off the tape. Jiggy!

The Lox's *Money, Power & Respect* wouldn't get a astro to work, but it would have to bring better beats than that. Since the Lox are more "underground" than Mase in Puffy's map of the heavens, we get fewer pony hooks and nobody smiles. A track like "Livin' the Life" attempts to one-up Mobs Deep at their own my-teeth-are-clenched-but-I'm-still-feeling-it game of urban male grief, but just sounds grumpy. "If You Think I'm Jiggy" is notable for its loopy, Premier-style beat and cut-of-the-Rod Stewart chorus, but the combination of yet more commodity shoutouts and fuckster anti-romance is pretty unattractive. .

Without a single notable stylist or a collective charisme, the Lox make ugly tales sound ugly and "conscious" rhymes sound bizarre: What, in the face of all the cheap sex, car purchases, and dumb ass sampling, are we supposed to make of "Let's Start Rap Over"—a search for, let me check this, love? (Meekins may appreciate that Will Smith album.) "Goin' Be Some Shit" works up some sass with a Meters rip and MC Lyte quote and "All For the Love" has a spooky new-style minimalist beat. But "So Right" rips off the same Cheryl Lynn tune pilfered on *The Firm* album a few months ago (staff meetings, guys!) and "The Heist" is more of that cinematic junk fusing up hip-hop nowadays, proving that dumb gimmicks age even worse than dumb samples.

Puffy introduces "Get This S" with an attack on critics of the Bad Boy non-philosophy of aggressive accrual: "Why they always talking about money? 'Cause we like money, bitch." Like *Money, Power & Respect*, it's not funny or scary or much of a response, something you could never accuse Big Poppa of. *Greed* isn't as interesting as hunger, unless we all feel like we're wearing shiny suits. For now, I'll take the robes of the funky cleric and his psychotic psalms. If I can't make my Honda shkoe, I'll just head for Hole-Bopp.

Sasha Frere-Jones

7 Scott Weiland**12 Bar Blues** (Atlantic)**2 Jerry Cantrell****Boggy Depot** (Columbia)

Now, grunge lacks even the gravity to hold groups together. Some rise, some fall, and some just splinter off side projects like the new releases from Scott Weiland and Jerry Cantrell, a lost Pilot and an unchained Alice, respectively.

Clean and solo, Scott Weiland remains the clown prince of kooks, or at least the clown prince of cuckoo-bird aesthetics. The cuckoo, an irresponsible bird, lays its eggs in other birds' nests knowing they'll care for the poor things. The Weiland, similarly, is not above tricking Pearl Jam fans into raising his young, even as he flirts with Led Zeppelin and trip-hop. We like this about the Weiland; we marvel at his embraceable shamelessness. And in continuing this cycle, *12 Bar Blues* lays an egg of confused flakery and off-putting put-ons while still sneezing its way into our homes and hearts.

Indeed, the lone Weiland is more sonically incoherent and arbitrary than ever (no more of those annoying DaLao brothers trying to hold the Stone Temple Pilots sound together). When he rips off "Jane Says," old Billy Joe, NIN, Bing Crosby, whole Beatles bridges, and Pauline Kael (this is not a complete list) it doesn't come off as some trendy post-modern reference game. More like a well-dressed guy who woke up with total amnesia and a note in his pocket reminding him that he made records.

This is not a bad thing. "Barbarella" is the best Bowie song in years (right down to the Reznor drum sound), nailing the post-party exhausted eroticism that set Bowie apart from mere glam. The electronic grind of "Cool Kids" keeps falling out of pitch in mysterious ways, tracing the gray line between avant-garde and just really fucked-up. "Opposite Octave Reaction" runs with the foxes

and blitzes like a ballroom. Take those three, "Jimmy Was a Stimulator," and "About Nothing"; put 'em on an EP; slap on a label describing it as "art-kitsch '70s-philia on the smoothed-out pop-industrial tip"; and you're a'genius.

But if you are instead the Weiland, you haven't a clue, and do things like green-light "Lady, Your Roof Brings Me Down" as the lead single—the least appealing song on the album (unless you think cabaret music is where it's at, but are annoyed by how tuneful that Tom Waits guy is). Weiland is perhaps less a cuckoo than an aimless, charismatic child, repeating phrases he doesn't understand and remaining oblivious to his own incidental charms. On the other hand, Alice in Chains guitarist Jerry Cantrell's solo turn is disarmingly grown-up. Alice's ominous grunge-metal was always Sabbath for college kids, rocking the Beavis and the boulevardiers. *Boggy Depot* is basically post-collegiate—not in its intelligence but in its grad-grind all-work-and-no-play spirit. Apparently he never noticed that the old gang was at its best getting weird, or copping the Mamas and the Papas sound for a minute or two.

Boggy Depot is the quintessential solo project, insofar as it sounds exactly like you'd expect a Jerry Cantrell solo album to sound: Alice chord changes by the bushel, weary tunes sung so poorly you'd think it was indie rock. As a Jerry Cantrell solo album, it argues eloquently for Layne Staley's genius.

The only surprise is "Between," a simple-sweet Southern lope with a fat Who lift. The tracks run from five to upwards of eight minutes; this didn't work for Oasis, and doesn't work here. Like Oasis, Cantrell knows that his core audience doesn't depend on the radio, so he spends an hour taking them for granted. Aliceheads ought to be offended, but if you think AIC is dope, "My Song," "Settling Down," and "Satisfy" might just be your cup of methadone.

Jane Dark

6 Hepcat**Right on Time** (Helicat)**7 Dropkick Murphys**
Do or Die (Helicat)

Most of the 13-year-old boys I know want to start ska bands even though, outside of Rancid and Sublime, most of the ska they've heard is really just power

pop with a wobbly bass line tacked on. Raised on Green Day but now equally accepting of Prodigy and Third Eye Blind, they're happy as long as music is faster, catchier, and more rhythmic than all that gloomy grunge snooze their older brothers used to like. Tim Armstrong from Rancid seems to have started his new label Helicat at least partly to educate such kids—one of its first releases, *Right on Time* by L.A.'s nine-member Hepcat (what's with all these cats?), bounces like Jamaica used to back when ska still meant playing New Orleans boogie-woogie backward; spy-movie organ instrumentals, horn melodies that do more than just gratuitously fart in the locker room, soulish vocal timbres layered with complexity and sweetness. A warm, easy sound, not rushed like '90s skacore.

Problem is, Hepcat might be too pure—even inept fakes like Goldfinger and Reel Big Fish have more personality. Hepcat come off like straight-A history majors who've memorized

7 Various Artists**Platinum Breakz II**

(Metalheadz/Hfr)

5 Various Artists**Blueprint** (Moving Shadow/frr)

In the beginning, jungle was a dialogue between Britain's rave scene and New York hip-hop's street-smart scientists of sound; a conversation between funk and expanded circuitry voiced by uncontrollably giddy, drug-addled 18-year-olds. Eustonville collaborators Rob Playford and Goldie were two of the most articulate participants in this cross-Atlantic colloquy. Playford established the once-peerless label Moving Shadow by making irresistibly chipper, hyperactive hip-house records under the monikers 2 Bad Mice and Kaotic

Chemistry. Goldie, meanwhile, became jungle's superstar by creating "dark jungle," which—in his early incarnation as Rufuge Kru—welded the apocalyptic stabs of Brooklyn's technicolor warlord Joey Beftram to the grapeshot snare of jungle's time-warped breakbeats.

But where the first wave of dark jungle was the inevitable, paranoid hangover from too much partying, the new wave of noir released by Goldie's Metalheadz label and collected on *Platinum Breakz II* is a reaction to a very different malaise. The intense glare of the media spotlight in Britain has left a sour taste in the mouths of most junglists, and their response has been to retreat back underground by creating a ghastly, inhuman racket that no sane person would want to listen to. The once-flowing dialogue has now become a spoilt brat's tantrum of moaning synths and petulant textures. *Platinum Breakz II* is all concussive, crash-test beats and foghorn basslines, joined together at angles so sharp you could cut your eye out.

There are some ghosts in the machinery, however. Adam F.'s "Newtown" "Metropolis" manages to evoke both crumbling, inner-city dystopia and dance-floor heaves in the same breath. Second-hand reminiscences of old New York add a bit of flesh to the steely cybernetics and clinical production values. J. Majik's "Your Sound" is a slash 'n' grab raid on the B-boy national anthem, the Incredibl Bongo Band's "Apache," while a sample of disco stalwart D-Train lubricates Hidden Agenda's "Pressin' On."

Jungle producers are gearheads to a fault. Instead of spending weeks on end studying arcane diminished sevenths like fusionists (those other exponents of music toys for boys), breakbeat scientists spend weeks on end woodshedding with their Akai S3000 samplers. Ample evidence of jungler's affinity for jazz fusion can be heard on *Blueprint*, which chronicles the label Moving Shadow's descent into the unseemly world of opulently atmospheric music to accompany ads

for luxury sedans. The ancestry of the glistening jungle ozed by Moving Shadow's current roster—Dead Calm, Aqua Sky, Flytronix—is '70s jazz-funk like Lonnie Liston Smith and Leroy Hutson. This is the same source material for hip-hop producers like the RZA and DJ Premier. But where hip-hop artists sample the bass line of something like Bob James's "Nautilus," junglists sample the flute solo.

Blueprint labels itself "the definitive Moving Shadow compilation," but the only one of the label's acknowledged classics that appears is Deep Blue's "Helicopter Tune." Any euphoria generated by the song's thrashing drum-breaks is swiftly evaporated by the almost baroque synth pads and watery tinctures of Aqua Sky's "Images '84." Elsewhere, there are some forays into the aggressively metallic techstep style, but the preponderance of Kenny G.-style sax solos and smarmy Fender Rhodes licks on offer makes this jungle you could take home to Mom and Dad.

Peter Shapiro

Spin rating system

10	A Classic	5	Margin
9	Never perfect	4	Poor
8	Very good	3	Dud
7	Worthy	2	Worthless
6	Reasonably good	1	Vile



every last '60s bluebeat inflection, but ain't got no street smarts. They're lost in a time that never existed.

Hepcat's Hellcat labelmates Dropkick Murphys, named for a hard-luck rehab center in their native Boston, aren't so loveloved—they'd just as soon punch a girl in the gobs as wear her. Making Irish jigs go "Oll" like nobody since the Pogues on *Red Roses for Me* in 1984, *Do or Die* is all-for-one/one-for-all boy bonding. The lads yell "Hey!" or "Oll" over and over with no lack of exclamation marks, in blotto brogues learned from great-grandfathers, keeping it reel. Their message is that the beer-guzzled middle-aged hardhats on their CD's front cover are at one with the ravaging slam-pit baddies on its back cover, that fighting the good drunken fight is punk rock even if it means bickering with the wife end kids. Chumbawamba could relate: "We all fall down, so get up now" in one Murphys song; "Piss your deys

away...away...away" two songs later. Then a whiskey drink, a vodka drink, a lager drink....

The Pogues were big social drinkers too, of course. Like England's ska-reviving Specials before them, they took an uplifting two-step ethnic dance music and made it more aggressive; Dropkick Murphys, unlike Hepcat, retain that aggression. They rock like infantry grunts wishing they were back on the block—"Cadence to Arms," martial boot beats, a Gulf War sea chantey, ancient emerald-green mug-clanking melodies grabbing your heart and smacking it around a bit. The Murphys express ethnic patriotism with an ode to '70s Belfast heroes Stiff Little Fingers, then community pride by updating the Kingston Trio's always-rowdy 1959 Boston-subway jam "M.T.A." Their pennywhistles meld into an anthemic Clash roar, and even their power chords feel like flags waving.

Chuck Eddy

Beats and Bytes

Simon Reynolds on the Chain Reaction label's shimmery, Sensurround brand of "heroin house"



When pop's final reckoning is done, house music is not going to be remembered for adding to the sum of "great songs," nor for its pantheon of distinctive vocalists. Its real innovation resides elsewhere—in its post-Donna Summer/Giorgio Moroder pulse-rhythms (the neurotic-erotic beat that never stops), and in its skin-tinglingly synaesthetic texture.

In this spirit, the arch-minimalist Berlin label Chain Reaction has distilled house down to its essence: no songs, no vocals, barely any melodies, sometimes not even a beat. What's left after this rigorous reduction is a music made up entirely of texture, rhythm, and space. What initially sounds monotonous reveals itself as an endlessly inflect-

ed, fractal mosaic of glow-pulses and flicker-riffs. Using studio processes like EQ, filtering, phasing, and panning to tweak the frequencies and stereo-imaging of their sonic motifs, CR artists weave tantalizing tapestries whose strands shift in and out of the aural spotlight. The effect is at once sensuous—like fingertips tremulously caressing your neck—and spiritual.

Chain Reaction has purified house to the point where it's almost lost its functional raison d'être and become a meditative head-trip. While the music mostly chugs along at club tempo and is clearly designed to sound at its utmost and outermost when played through a massive sound system, it's hard to imagine people doing something as profane as shaking their stuff to it.

Take the label's aesthetic pinnacle to date, the drumless "Resilient 1.2": a slow-motion tsunami of ego-melting, body-boundary-hemorrhaging bliss. Some people call the CR sound "heroin house"; "Resilient 1.2" actually reminds me of the Velvet Underground's "Heroin." A soundtrack in waiting for the first zero-gravity nightclub, it was my favorite track of 1997; you can find it on the CD *Decay Product*, a compilation of tracks by



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reviews

3 Silver Apples Beacon

(Whirlybird Records)

4 Add N to X On the Wires of Our Nerves

(Satellite Records)

Long before house, techno, and electronica, there was another tradition of weird synthetic music. Stretching from engineer/autateurs Louis and Bebe Barron (who scored *Forbidden Planet*) to musicus-concrete renegade Pierre Henry, from E-Z listening eccentric Jean-Jacques Perrey to Roxy Music's non-musician Brian Eno, these sound-scientists built Moogie Wonderlands of future-pop using primitive analog synthesizers. New York's electronic duo Silver Apples belong to this lineage. Their cult reputation rests on their two hard-to-find late '60s albums. On *Silver Apples* and *Contact*, Simeon played banks of oscillators, generating a pulsating soundworld stoked by the

percolator hiss of Danny Taylor's drastically unsyncopated drums. Tracks like "Misty Mountain" and "Seagreen Serenades" created a peculiarly pastoral version of cybernetic music, a hissing machine-in-the-garden driven by Siemone's fey vocals, piping and fluting like an Elizabethan troubadour at the Court of the Crimson King.

In revivifying the tradition of analog weird science, late '90s



the production team Various Artists.

Based out of Berlin's Hard Wax record store, Chain Reaction is the sister label of Black Channel, whose nine 12-inch releases were the toast of techno-house cognoscenti throughout the mid-'90s (but don't let that put you off). Devoted to vinyl, the mysterious figures behind the twin labels established their own pressing plant. This makes Chain Reaction's series of single-artist CD compilations—Porter Ricks's *Biokinetics*, Vainequeur's *Eleven*, Maurizio's *Hongkong*, and Decay Product—a curious chink in the label's ideological armor.

Pray open the striking tin canisters that contain the CDs, and on tracks like Maurizio's "MS" you'll encounter electronic music as warmly cocooning and appetizing as the lining of the womb. "Heroin house" certainly fits the amniotic/narcotic aura of these often ten-minute-long tracks. But the CR palette of timbres actually feels more like Ecstasy sensations encoded in sound, abstracted into a Velcro-sticky audio-fabric that tugs at your skin/fabrics and gets your goosebumps rippling in formation. Melody is minimal, limited to rudimentary vamp and riffs, because its real function is to showcase the materiality of sound-in-itself. Simple motifs twist the timbre-fabric in order to best show off its properties, making you thrill to the scintillating play of creases, crinkles, and kinks.

CR music isn't all opiated oblivion: Monolake's "Lentau" and "Macau" are like Chinese reggae, while Porter Ricks's material often has an abrasive industrial tinge, reflecting the fact that one half of the duo is acclaimed ambient experimentalist Thomas Koner. But my favorite CR output is the stuff that offers a sublime surrogate for the MDMA experience, a bliss-space you can access at any time than leave, without cost or comedown. That said, this music's appeal extends way beyond ravers—anyone who's ever swooned to neo-psychadelic like Spacemen 3 and My Bloody Valentine, or been mesmerized by minimalist like Steve Reich, will find almost unbearable pleasures here.

As well as Chain Reaction's own CD and vinyl 12-inch output (available at domestic price), addicts will want to search out the artists' releases on other labels: Porter Ricks's self-titled album on Mille Plateaux, Various Artists's glistening plasmascapes "No. 8" on Fatcat. Porter Ricks also created a fine remix album, *The Koner Experiment*, based on music by Experimental Audio Research—a collection that includes ex-Spacemen 3 leader Sonic Boom and MBV's Kevin Shields. That fact alone should seduce any hesitant psych-guitar fiends into taking the plunge. •

Chain Reaction c/o Submerge Distribution, 2000 Grand River, Suite 101, Detroit, MI 48226, (313) 963-1025

Moog obsessives such as Add N to X and Sklyb adopted the Silver Apples as precursors, forcing a belated reappraisal that's led to their reunion and third album, *Beacon*. Like so many comebacks, however, it's a total nonstarter. Unreconstructed '60s lyrics like "You jump-start my dreams / Your eyes are like beams of starlight" had me scurrying to the fridge for a drink or three. More disappointing still is Steve Albini's flat, dispirited production. He's worked very hard, or so it seems, to dampen the oscillator energy that is Silver Apples' entire d \acute{e} tre.

By comparison, London trio Add N to X are as exuberantly artificial as it gets. Synthesists Ann Shenton, Barry Smith, and Steven Clayton create a world permanently altered by cybernetics. The *Wires*' cover shows Shenton giving birth to a Moog via bloody cesarean section, an image inspired by director Donald Cammell's '70s cyberthriller *Demon Seed*, in which supercomputer Proteus IV rapes Julie Christie to produce a mutant baby. Add N to X are that baby all grown up. Live, they're the most alien experience in England right now, three terrorists from tomorrow consulting settings in their notepads and adjusting their analog synths to play harpsichord fugues as chilling and charming as Walter/Wendy Carlos's *A Clockwork Orange* score.

Kristin Hersh
Strange Angels
(Rykodisc)



Kristin Hersh used to say in interviews that she wasn't quite sure where her songs came from—that they simply took over and had their way with her. Listening to her last solo LP, the luminous and visceral *Hips and Makers*, and her records as singer/guitarist of Throwing Muses, it was easy enough to believe it. Hersh's songs dug deep into the grooves of emotional devastation, sexual treachery, and psychic trauma. Her shivery, wolf-girl

On the Wires reveals and revels in a spectrum of scrambled sensations. "Planet Munich" is a Teutonic threnody full of solemn weeping tones abruptly cut through by synth-percussion like showers of ball bearings. "Gentle Germans" is at once wistful and swollen with hopeful portentousness, while "The Sound of Accelerating Concrete" runs a Bach-style toccata against an undecipherable 1940s movie sample. In "Murmur One," syn-drums programmed into brutalizing jungle patterns suddenly drop out for a robot-voiced microtreatise on sonic perception: "Will I recognize the sound I hear when I want it / Will I want the sound I recognize when I hear it?"

"Sir Ape" and the awesome debut single "The Black Regent" reveal a bombastic bounce driven by drums that slap like wooden crates being punched. Keyboard tones tube and twist, while top notes nag-nag-nag at your hips. "King Wasp" is irresistible Vocoder voodoo built around a crackling boogie guitar sample and Barry Smith's sybaritic, synth-programmed drawl. In fact, every voice throughout is Vocoderized. The electronic energy Add N to X so brilliantly transmit turned them into soft machines long ago. *[Satellite c/o Soul Jazz Records, 12 Ingestre Place, London W1R 3LP; England]*

Kodwo Eshun

vocals could evoke both terror and tenderness—but they weren't a surefire way to sell records. After some 13 years of churning out critically acclaimed but commercially lukewarm records, Throwing Muses finally called it quits last year, leaving Hersh to strike out on her own.

Kristin Hersh's lyrics either make sense to you or they don't. When they do, it's almost always a meaning caught on the fly, like the sudden flutters of movement you sometimes hallucinate out of the corner of your eye when you're alone in an empty room. "It's the blaze across my nightgown," Hersh sang on *Hips and Makers*. Seemingly lifted straight out of the dreamtime movie reels we project on the backs of our skulls, the line conjures Julie Harris in *The Haunting*, weaving frantically down the corridors of a malevolent house, with only her flimsy nightie standing between her and unspeakable evil.

But it would take a whole bonfire of nightmares to illuminate Hersh's willfully opaque songs on *Strange Angels*. Musically, the album

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reviews

consists of the same raw materials as *Hips and Makers*: Hersh's spare melodies and crisply austere acoustic guitar and restrained keyboards, with the moonbeam glow of a cello adding extra shading here and there. Many of the songs sound almost medieval, like hipster shepherdesses ditties. Hersh's voice, with its pleasantly crinkly, pleated-paper vibrato, is more than adequate to the task of navigating the side-winding passages and false bottoms of her tricky song structures.

Yet *Strange Angels* is almost impossible to warm up to: The lyrics are often downright silly, and they stand out baldly against Hersh's ascetic melodies. On *Hips and Makers*, and in the Muses, Hersh medes her spacially evocative images soar. But here her gnomish

wordplay grows progressively wearying. "Fill a glass up with shiny tacks / I'm feeling sharp, I am numb," she sings matter-of-factly on "Some Catch Flies." By the time "Pale" rolls around, Hersh has smushed head-on into self-parody: "There are fishes that are stronger than my legs."

Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between lyrics that have been channelled through a ghost and those that spring simply from good old-fashioned song-writing labor. But in the parallel universe of *Strange Angels*, self-conscious surrealism really does rule the day. Hersh walks through these songs with her eyes wide open; she tells us much more when she's only half-awake.

Stephanie Zacharek

would never tolerate: "A feel for the sea does not appeal to me / And winter's not cold enough," O'Hagan pouts on "Painters Paint.") *Cold and Bouncy*, according to its creator, was also influenced by electronica's paradoxical marriage of digital chill and boisterous beats. The chill is awesome; the album brims with mesmerizing glaciars of sound. The bounce is less blatant. The Llamas shun obvious payoffs—driving beats, saccharine hooks—in favor of tweaked treble, aware that only pop that refuses to be catchy can be simultaneously cold and bouncy.

Late '90s pop is doomed to be derivative, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's bunk. O'Hagan, though, would rather be seen as an innovator. Like Stereolab, for whom O'Hagan has arranged strings and brass since 1993, the High Llamas cloak their appropriation under the guise of forward-looking experimentalism.

My main squeeze, who was formerly under the endearing delusion that O'Hagan's clan were some sort of Buddhist-ordained pop collective (the High *Lamas*), now thinks the name evokes a stoned South American beast of burden. That's a cooler image than the true source, a Victorian hot-air balloon. O'Hagan isn't full of hot air. He carries the burden of his influences with grace and a clueless smirk—the only expression that llamas know.

Joshua Westlund

7 The High Llamas *Cold and Bouncy*

(V2, 1997)



Head High Llama Sean O'Hagan worships a living deity, albeit a fallen one: Brian Wilson. His sonic piffing starts with the Beach Boys' masterpiece *Pet Sounds*, grazes obscure European soundtrack artists, and soaks up everything that's ever influenced his sunnily ailles in *Stereolab* (Neul, Silver Apples, lounge music). The final concoction really ought to sound atrocious, a nauseous cocktail of disparate exotica: Farfisa duel with banjos over bossa nova pulses, and lush strings flourish as goofy gurgles cavort with squeaks and chimes. But the result is surprisingly palatable, like a glass of flat soda pop that tastes better without the carbonation.

More than on 1996's lush, orchestral *Hawaii*, O'Hagan distributes the music from his Brian Wilson fetish. (He even expresses sentiments that the author of the California myth

7 Robert Wyatt *Sheeep* (Thirsty Ear)

You have every right to get nervous when someone announces the

"return of a legend" you've never heard of. What is Robert Wyatt's legend based on, and how long has he been away, exactly? Tha

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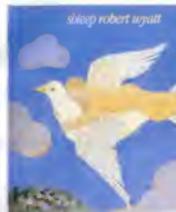
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called them prog-rock. Actually, Wyatt's macho-free swing drumming, hilarious lyrics, and impatience for long songs made them the anti-Ys. Proggers gazed into the purple portal of power; Wyatt sang about breaking his drum heads and the quality of tea at the BBC. He left Soft Machine in 1971, and two years later was permanently disabled when he fell out of an upstairs window. After

tape starts rolling with Soft Machine, a jazz-influenced British group that kicked butt in the late 1960s even though folks

his accident, the clouds of Wyatt's whimsy parted and revealed — no surprise — serious melancholy and a Socialist spirit that found its Zebedee in Margaret Thatcher. Somewhat miraculously, Wyatt matched the power of Soft Machine with his very different, but equally unique, lyrical solo recordings, including 1974's woozy masterpiece *Rock Bottom*, *Ruth Is Stranger Than Richard*, and 1981's *Dondestan*.

Sleep, Wyatt's first album in six years, lives up to his various legacies with graceful mistakes, grown-up melodies, and rhythms that care more about the earth turning than your ass shaking. Much of *Sleep* was written and recorded with his wife, Alfreda Benge, and a trail mix of stars busy sounding nothing like themselves, including former Roxy guitarist Phil Manzanera, longtime Wyatt collaborator Brian Eno, and, of all people, Paul Weller. Wyatt has been doing "ambient" music since *Rock Bottom*, his version of "ambient" meaning simply that lyrics get no special treatment and all sounds are equal, excepting his price-

less, homeless choirboy voice. "Heaps of Sheep" is a rolling daydream about the nightmare of insomnia, with Eno lending vocals and nudging the Caribbean lilt until staying up and going to sleep seem like the same thing. On the beautiful "Maryan," guitar, violin, and Wyatt's backwoods trumpet fuse to make a song about a river actually sound like one.

Sleep's best song, though, is "Free Will and Testament." "Wondering, with graduate-level scansion, what we all think we're doing here," Wyatt sings: "The weight of dust exceeds the weight of settled objects / What can it mean, such gravity without a center? / Is there freedom to un-be?" Wyatt closes the library doors with the painful pleat that everyone eventually makes: "Let me off, please / I am so very tired." Electronists who don't know what people are capable of in real time will be shamed by the beauty of these boiled lullabies and irreducibly human sounds. *[Thirsty Ear, 274 Madison Avenue, Suite 804, New York, NY 10016]*

Sasha Frere-Jones

Singles

By Charles Aaron

Electronic dance music's moment in the media mirror ball has been somewhat less-than-ecstatic, not because certain artists have tried to "put a face" on the music or have released half-baked concept albums, but because the genre has hesitated to impose its own values on rock culture. Artists, labels, and fans should be dragging rockers into dance clubs (where string and moaning aren't the rule) instead of shlimping themselves into dreary rock venues (hello, Deft Punk). Singles should be emphasized and enjoyed with the serious glee usually reserved for

albums. And we should call a one-year moratorium on all mystical "explanations" of DJ culture — to rock a party means exactly that, whether you're Missy Elliott, Rage Against the Machine, or Carl Cox.

Big Punisher, "I'm Not a Player" (Loud)

While you're out mispronouncing overpriced champagne with some chickenhead in a Moschino knock-off, this overweight lover is eating you out of house and home as a sweet O' Jays song ("Darlin' Darlin' Baby") skips on the record player.

The Cannanies, "It's a Fine Line Between Pleasure and Pain" (Harriet)

Shades of a magnificent Patti Smith balled, but singer Frances Gibson is too despondent to summon the Best-popt rapture that might get her over the bridge. Instead, she's stuck in Australia with a cheesy drum machine.

Ani DiFranco, "Little Plastic Castle" (Righteous Babe)

Her often too-obvious stories — here, the lesbian couple is, of course, cool, and the small-town coffee-shop folks are, of course, bigots — may draw follicle applause, but DiFranco is a stampy-booted pop heroine because of the way her songs habitually abandon those stories for fits of churning rhythm guitar and frantic free associations. That's how "Little Plastic Castle" works when it works, but this version, with its jaunty "ska"

horns, is just too damned *amiable* for its own good.

Janet Jackson, "Together Again" (Virgin)

Nimble kick drum, heaving bass, hi-hat sprinkles, mechanical hand-claps? Whoa, house music on the radio — and it's not a remix! Meanwhile, the feathery melody serves as Janet's victory lap for the coolly audacious "Got 'Til It's Gone."

Pearl Jam, "Given to Fly" (Epic)

Eddie Vedder still wants your young hearts to run free, but his wailing pleases are way more convincing when the rhythm section slingshots him into the chorus and Mike McCready's hypnotic guitar roars like it's "Alive" all over again.

Peanut Butter Wolf, "Run the Line" (featuring Rasco) b/w "The Undercover" (featuring Encore) (AGV/Stones Throw)

Peanut Butter Wolf is the hip-hop underground's DJ Premier, a producer who uncannily adapts to any rapper's style, accenting his lyrical essence with the perfect beat or timely scratch. Unfortunately, he's yet to find an MC with the brash spark of his late partner Charizma (calling all Hieroglyphic!), though Rasco's conversational boom will do for now.

Porpellerheads, "Bang On!" (DreamWorks)

All rolling guitar samples and spew-

ing digi-funk, this is the delirious, non-bitch-smacking anthem missing from Prodigy's *The Fat of the Land*.

Queen Pen, "Man Behind the Music" and "All My Love" (Interscope)

If Puff Daddy's gonna bite Teddy Riley, then I guess Teddy oughta bite Puffy back (though someone's gonna get an infection before long). These two joints possess about as much artistic integrity as *Scream 2*, but as Bad Boy parodies they're sorta emusng (the car horn is an annoyingly nice touch). Too bad Queen Pen herself is the most boring bisexual rapper in the history of hip-hop.

Überzone, "The Freaks Believe in Beats EP (City of Angels)

Überzone (a.k.a. O) started out as electro's Professor Irwin Corey (his studio is the Institute of Gizmology), but these tracks are less wacky unhinged, with deft breakbeats bopping beneath geometric squiggles. Imagine Deft Punk's more coordinated cousin, if he lived in Anaheim. •

Addresses: City of Angels, 8391 Beverly Blvd., #184, Los Angeles, CA 90048; Herriet, PO Box 649, Cambridge, MA 02238; Righteous Babe, PO Box 95, Ellicott Station, Buffalo, NY 14205; Stones Throw, 3555 S. El Camino Real, #320, San Mateo, CA 94403

Green Pen: the jewel in *Teddy Riley's* crown



Resurrection Shuffle

John Fahey's Revenant label bestows the breath of life. By **Byron Coley**

Since Smithsonian Folkways' ballyhooed reissue of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, many of our world's dullest knobs seem to have been reborn as experts in roots music. So it's a safe bet that spasms of delight will greet the latest release on avant-acoustic guitar: John Fahey's label Revenant: Doc Boggs's *Country Blues*, which collects the complete early (circa 1927-29) recordings by the dark godfather of all banjo-wielding Appalachian form destroyers.

All of Boggs's music (including that of his '60s "rediscovery" period) is mind-blowingly great, and the packaging of *Country Blues* is equally amazing. Lyrics, pics, and essays are bound into a lovely hardcover book, making *Country Blues* a masterpiece of recycling.

But when you begin to examine the list of other Revenant releases, the brain begins to fog up. Some titles

have an obvious affinity with Boggs (Harmonica Frank Floyd, Buell Kazee, etc.), but there are a host of others that emanate from a different creative universe. What do Cecil Taylor, Crime, and Derek Bailey have to do with roots music? If you're asking that, you're asking the wrong question, according to label manager Dean Blackwood.

John and I talked about what kind of people were worth documenting," recalls Blackwood. "Although we had different people in mind, we found that they had a commonality in a shared rawness of vision. None were interested in doing things that other people suggested, none would be deterred from doing what they wanted to do."

With that spiritual oneness as the label's aesthetic spine, Revenant's releases begin to assume Euclidean geometric wholeness. Music and Dance, by English improvisational guitarist Derek Bailey and Japanese



post-Butoh dance giant Min Tanaka, reissues an obscure cassette filled with the telekinetic transmissions between Bailey's splatterly strings, Tanaka's sinewy stretches, and the forces of nature. *Happy Days*, by Jim O'Rourke (who produced Fahey's recent, wiggled-out *Womblife* CD for Table of the Elements), is an intoxicating exploration of the drone qualities latent in both the hurdy-gurdy and steel-stringed acoustic guitars. *Never-til, the Beautiful One Has Come*, a two-CD set by Cecil Taylor recorded in Copenhagen in '62, documents the pianist's first fully realized attempt to bridge the worlds of avant-garde jazz and contemporary classical music. While none of these are "primitive" recordings in a strict ethnological sense, each certainly manifests an

unbending adherence to its artist's own singular creed. This is what unites them with their premodern brethren on Revenant.

The Stanley Brothers' *Earliest Recordings* collects 14 ancient sides by these protean explorers of the hot, sad art of bluegrass, complete with an extremely well-researched book that appeals to the Greil Marcus inside us all. As does *American Primitive Vol. 1: Raw Pre-War Gospel* (1926-36), whose Fahey-penned accompanying booklet, about the skewed ethnomusicology of these sacred songs from the dawn of recorded street blues, is almost as crazed as the music. And there is blazinly twisted shit here, much of which has never been reissued before. In some ways, *American Primitive*—four more volumes of which are scheduled—is even more mind-bending than Harry Smith's *Anthology*.

Judging by some of the goodies awaiting release—Fahey's *Footnote 78s*; the complete recordings of Crime (*SP's* rawest/dumbest art punks); John Breckow's archival church recordings of steel guitar-wielding preacher Lomie Farris—Revenant has clearly tapped a rich, hidden vein of our collective subconscious. And if you can't dig that, well, eat dirt. •

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Pop First Place: Granian Second Place: The Schugars (tie)		

heavy rotation

A recap of the past few months' most notable releases



Alpha
Come from Heaven
(Melankolic)

What you're missing: Lab Schwin's *Mission*, an impossible soundtrack for the lone *Conductor*. At their best, Portishead's fellow Bristolians understand that risking ridiculousness is the best way to keep super-modal boredom at bay. (Salomon)



Ani DiFranco
Little Plastic Castle
(Righteous Babe)

What you're missing: "Zyoptes of songs" (her own term) with a guitar prowess she rarely gets credit for
Conclusion: Girlfriend is on a mission to carve out a safe space for misfit sexual anarchists who admit love hurts. (Hermes)



The Donnas
American Teenage Rock 'n' Roll Machine
(Lookout)

What you're missing: The Donnas squeeze ten songs into a 24-minute album into 24 shiny minutes of party-metal hair spray
Conclusion: These desperate teenage lovebirds insist that girls couldn't give it up to live it up. (Eddy)



David Holmes
Let's Get Killed
(1500)

What you're missing: A love letter to the Caramel Apple, featuring unhinged street rants and raps that Holmes collected on DAT during a recent pilgrimage
Conclusion: He may just be a funky white boy from Belfast, but he's the kind of tunable party we could use more of right now. (Hermes)



Modest Mouse
The Lonesome Crowded West
(Up)

What you're missing: A young postpunk trio absorbed by a peculiarly American kind of loneliness—a strip mall ennui fueled by watery Skuppies and sugar highs
Conclusion: The music creates a fleeting illusion that's almost as good as actually getting somewhere. (Cox)



Pearl Jam
Yield
(Epic)

What you're missing: Part touchstone, part parish, Pearl Jam have tried arty gestures; they've ostentatiously declined to rock; now they've come back with an album full of gracefully ambivalent anthems
Conclusion: The revelation of *Yield* is Vedder's effort to communicate again. (Smith)



Timbaland and Magoo
Welcome to Our World
(Blackground/Atlantic)

What you're missing: High-powered ass music from Tim "Timbaland" Mosley, the fly 24-year-old producer who has more funk per-square-inch than an old Reggae bar
Conclusion: Timbaland's typewriter funk makes R&B seem cutting edge again. (Frere-Jones)



2Pac
RU Still Down (Remember Me)
(Amaru/Jive)

What you're missing: This second collection of pre-prison material (1991-94) is prophecy from a voice that buried itself in grief well before the body's demise
Conclusion: As always, there's ample self-destructive bullshit, but as a whole the album's earn and undeniable. (Brett)



Various Artists
V Classic
(Ultra/Konkrete Jungle)

What you're missing: The V Recordings crew—Ronin Size, DJ Knust, DJ Dope, Bryan Gee, and Jumping Jack Frost—treating drum'n'bass as shattered jazz, a funk of imperfection
Conclusion: As haunted as deep blues and as hard as Gang of Four. (Blashill)



Victoria Williams
Musings of a Creekdrifter
(Atlantic)

What you're missing: With her exquisitely elfin voice, Williams posts dispatches from some fairytale where God is always on your side and the wind is your friend
Conclusion: There's sappy, and then there's freaky-sappy, and Williams is the latter. (Vowell)



MARILYN MANSON

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Out of the Groove

Experimental "post-rock" bands feed your head, but do they fail your feet? By Rob Michaels



Wolf Flowers:
Tortoise carefully consider coming out of their shell

In his timeless rumination on smut, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart wrote that while he couldn't define obscenity, he knew it when he saw it. The same could be said for the elusive "it" that animates music, that vital abandon or momentum that makes something "swing," "rock," or "funk." Since even the dimmest knuckle-dragger could tell you that "it" has been basically AWOL from rock—indie, alternative, or otherwise—for the past few years, the kids from the gifted class have wisely tried diving into the oceans of sound comprising dub, jungle, techno, jazz, and other non-rock genres, hoping to shed their kitschy Bermude trunks and horn-rimmed goggles for a full-on skinny-dip.

These so-called post-rockers have largely scrapped the ready signposts of rock structure and emotion—confessional or ironic lyrics, verses-choruses-verses, a surfeit of literal "self-expression"—in favor of sonic, rhythmic, and textual flux. The post-rockers embrace protean dance genres like techno and jungle for their avant-garde tools and tones,

not for the zesty commercial flavor that disco gave the Rolling Stones' "Miss You"; they mine reggae not for any feel-good Rastaman vibrations but rather for dub's concussive throb and deconstructed remixology.

The rub is that these mostly non-bohemian genres have their own rules, conventions, and functions essential to making them tick. Unlike indie rock, which prides itself on not having to "work" for anyone, even the most dissonant techno or jungle generally has to move the rug-cutters. And while dub is very much about mystical studio trickery and sci-fi sonic abstraction, a sticky tropical heat still burns in the music's heart, making its circular, repetitive rhythms not just static but ecstatic. Dub's headfuck effects may free your mind, but its patient, boooming bass ensures that your ass will follow. This doesn't argue for rigid genre purism; the mongrelized, syncretic histories of rock (or jazz, jungle, rap, etc.) disproves that. It's just that in a dog-eat-dog world of back-elley mutts, a calculated synthesis like "post-rock" will have

a tough time surviving outside the sound laboratory.

Chicago's Tortoise seem as well-qualified as anyone to beat these Darwinian odds. Led by classically trained percussionist John McEntire, the sextet covers Lake Michigan's fertile musical waterfront, doubling as jazz-whiz guitarists (new full-time member Jeff Parker), jungle DJs (percussionist John Hemdon), and classic indie rockers (bass: Doug McCombs plays with Eleventh Dream Day). The band's thoughtful stabs at melding these diverse influences have soiled many critical shorts and positioned them at the head of the advance-placement "post-rock" (or whatever they'd rather call it) class.

Like its predecessors, Tortoise's third full-length release, *7/7* (Thrill Jockey), is a decidedly undressed affair, closer to the cable network than the explosive substance. While it favors the jazzy and acoustic over the overtly experimental or electronic, *7/7* is filled with artfully constructed music. On the spare "Ten-Dey Interval," the band neatly perfects its trademark infringement of Steve Reich's merimbe spirals by adding a simple but gorgeous piano countermelody. The title track deftly layers languid and insinuating guitar and trombone figures atop a crisp drum riff, while the short "Almost Always Is Nearly Enough" is a bracing union of jagged electronic beats and dense African percussion that matches the best of On-U-Sound's avant-dub experiments.

But if *7/7* is long on impressive bones, it's short on compelling flesh. As usual, Tortoise are too cautious, hedging their varied influences like toxic chemicals that must be gingerly juxtaposed lest they fuse into genuine dynamite. Disparate elements like the tropical groove, Ry Cooder guitar, and 4/4 handclaps of "In Sarah, Mencken, Christ, and Beethoven There Were Women and Men" mesh beautifully; but the results sound micromanaged, never congealing into the propulsive booty-call that's lurking in their recessive genes. Unwilling to risk, or unable to stomach, the incontinent bombast that sometimes erupts when marking bold new sonic territory (e.g., Demo Suzuki's unlis-

tenable baby-babble on Can's "Aumgn," the onanistic outbursts of most '70s space jazz), Tortoise end up prisoners of their own good taste and tight pants.

Flying solo as *Pan American*, Labrador guitarists Mark Nelson has better luck at sneaking in beneath his own sonic radar. Taking a welcome sabbatical from Labrador's haunting but relatively grooveless soundscape impressionism, Nelson not only gets rhythm, he gives it space to work. On *Pan American* (Kranky) standout tracks "Starts Friday" and "Lake Supplies," live drums ricochet between chenille, meshing with melancholy piano, sci-fi squiggles, and a "dread" (albeit more existential than netty) bass line, while "Tract" nearly swings on the wings of its bossa nova breakbeats. This isn't to say that the moody *Pan American* is any kind of body music (hell, its pulse is not much quicker than that of its defunct corporate nemesis), just that Nelson gives his dub-style beats and dislocations enough breathing room to let his doldrums keep their drums.

Boymerang, n. Graham Sutton of British art rockers Psychosis, bypasses the post-rock challenge altogether through a complete electronic makeover. Ditching any vestiges of rock, Sutton has reinvented himself as a day-one junglist, eided by a fashion paradigm shift from Tommy Ramone to Tommy Hilfiger. Boymerang's debut, *Balance of the Force* (Astralwerks/Caroline), succeeds and fails on strictly junglist terms: Two essential, floor-burning singles, "Soul Beat Runna" and "Still," are surrounded by less distinguished tracks that dutifully touch on every drum and bass sub-style—hardstep, jazzytech, techstep, 12-step—to complete the album experience. The bom-again junglist Sutton may lack the dignity or the daring of most post-rockers, but in his best moments, he shows just how much dance music's seeming limitations actually enable its funk. If their efforts to transcend those "limits" were only less effortful, the post-rockers at "Catchin' Zzz's Rock 98.7" could finally stop sawing wood and instead make it rise in our britches. ♦

GENIUS LESSONS BY SEAN LANDERS

"23 GENASAURAS REX" THE OTHER WEEK I WAS WATCHING PETER JENNINGS MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS WHEN THIS SEGMENT COMES ON ABOUT HOW GENERATION X SHOULD MOVE OVER, THERE'S A NEW GENERATION ON THE WAY IN AND NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TO CALL IT. NO BIG SURPRISE, EVERY BODY KNOWS THAT TIME MARCHES ON AND THAT THE FIRST KIDS JACKO ALLEGEDLY MOLESTED ARE NOW OLD ENOUGH TO DO A LITTLE ALLEGED MOLESTING OF THEIR OWN. BUT HERE'S THE KILLER, THEN THEY PUT UP THEIR GRAPHIC WHICH HAS THE BABY BOOM GENERATION GOING FROM 1945 TO 1964? GENERATION X GOES FROM 1965 TO 1975 AND THIS NEW AS OF YET NAMELESS GENERATION FROM 1976 FORWARD. I BEG YOU PARDON, I WAS BORN IN 1962, AND I'LL BE DAMNED IF I'M A BABY BOOMER. WHEN I HEAR "SIT IN THE DOCK OF THE BAY" COME ON THE RADIO I CHANGE THE FREKKIN CHANNEL. TO INCLUDE PEOPLE BORN IN 1945 AND 1964 IN THE SAME GENERATION IS IN MANY CASES INCLUDING THE PARENT AND CHILD IN THE SAME DAMN GENERATION. ANY WAY, THIS OBVIOUSLY ONLY MATTERS TO ME BECAUSE I'M SO OLD, AND NO LONGER IN THAT 17-34 AGE BRACKET, I'M NOW IN THE 35-65 BRACKET, ME AND MY PARENTS, HIGH LIVING IN THE SAME GENERATION. SINCE I'M CLEARLY NOT IN THIS NEW GENERATION THAT THE BULK OF SPIN'S READERSHIP IS A PART OF I THOUGHT I MIGHT HAVE A LITTLE OBJECTIVE DISTANCE AND BE OF HELP IN NAMING YOU. THE FIRST NAME THAT COMES TO MIND OF COURSE IS GENERATION RETARD BUT THAT'S NOT FAIR BECAUSE NOT ALL OF YOU ARE RETARDED. SO HOW ABOUT GENERATION HELLO KITTY, GENERATION TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLE OR THE SAVED BY THE BELL GENERATION. SINCE YOU ALL GROW UP WATCHING BARNEY HOW ABOUT THE BABY BOOPERS, OR BECAUSE YOU ALL USED TO LOVE DINOSAURS SO MUCH HOW ABOUT GENASAURAS REX. MY PERSONAL FAVORITES ARE THE TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE GENERATION OR THE MOUTH CANNA GENERATION OR "BAKE THE LUVES" GENERATION OR HOW ABOUT SHOVEL THE SIDEWALK GENERATION! OR BETTER YET, "GET ME A GOD DAMNED BEER GENERATION"! YOU KNOW WHAT, I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT YOU CALL YOURSELVES. ALL I KNOW IS THAT I USED TO THINK I WAS IN GEN. X. NOW PETER JENNINGS HAS MADE ME A PART OF HIS GENERATION, GENERATION HAIR WHIP. I HATE THE FACT THAT I GOT STUCK IN THIS EX-HIPPIE-CUM-YUPPIE GENERATION BUT WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO ME SO LONG AS I HAVE A ROCKING CHAIR ON THE FRONT PORCH WHERE I CAN LEER AT ALL YOU TWENTY YEAROLDS FROM. BUT IF YOU'RE FEELING SPECIAL ABOUT YOUR YOUTH REMEMBER YOU ARE VERY, VERY STUPID AND YOU'RE ONLY GOOD FOR SEX SO MY ADVICE TO YOU IS TO HAVE LOTS OF IT, ESPECIALLY IF IT'S WITH US THIRTY YEAROLDS. NOW THAT GOES ESPECIALLY FOR YOU YOUNG GENASAURAS REX LADIES OUT THERE, LOOK KINDLY UPON YOUR ELDERS ESPECIALLY THE ONES WHO WRITE LAST PAGES FOR ROCK MAGAZINES THAT ARE NOT ROLLING STONE OR BILLBOARD.

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